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BUFFALO BILL, THE BUCKSKIN KING; or, THE AMAZON OF THE WEST.

BY MAJOR DANGERFIELD BURR,
5th CAVALRY, U. S. ARMY.



"LORD VARIAN HELD FORTH HIS HAND, WHICH THE PLAINSMAN GRASPED WARMLY, WHILE HE ANSWERED: 'YES,
AND I WOULD HAVE GONE UNDER BUT FOR YOU.'"

Buffalo Bill,

THE BUCKSKIN KING.

OR,
Wild Nell, the Amazon of the West.
A Life Romance of the Great American Scout.
BY MAJOR DANGERFIELD BURR,
5TH CAVALRY, U. S. ARMY.

CHAPTER I.

PROLOGUE.

It is moonlight on the prairie, and, fanned by no breath of air, the vast, rolling plain appears like the mighty ocean in a dead calm.

Afar off, towering aloft like a huge ship, is a motte, or timber island, and all around elsewhere the horizon is unbroken.

Upon the scene a calm like death seems to rest.

But suddenly it is broken; not ruthlessly by the sharp crack of the rifle, the wild war-whoop of the Indian, or the dismal howl of the prowling wolf, yet by a human voice.

Over the plains floats a rich tenor voice rising and falling in song.

As the singer appears above a roll in the prairie, his voice grows louder and clearer, and the words that come from his lips in perfect melody are known to all who speak the English language, for he is singing:

"Mid pleasures and palaces
Thou' we may roam,
Be it ever so humble,
There's no place like home."

But the silver-toned singer, who is sending his voice far over the prairie, as though unconscious of danger around, is not alone, for over the rolling plain appear two horsemen riding side by side.

Both are well mounted, the one on a white, the other on a black horse, and both are splendid-looking specimens of manhood, and yet wholly different in appearance, for one is a thorough type of a blonde, and the other a perfect brunette.

The former possesses a long beard, short curling hair, deep-blue eyes, and is dressed in a hunting suit of white corduroy, while he carries in front of him a silver-mounted rifle, and in his belt are a pistol and ivory-handled knife.

He it is that rides the white horse, and that he is not a plainsman is evident at a glance, though the moon shining brightly in his face shows him to possess courage and determination sufficient to make him a dangerous adversary.

His companion is a plainsman, or rather one that seems wholly at home on the wild prairies.

He is mounted upon a glossy black horse, with silver-mounted saddle and bridle, wears buckskin leggings stuck in high-top boots, and a hunting-shirt elaborately trimmed with beads, while a broad gray sombrero shades his face.

Still it is a strangely handsome face, though the eyes may be a little too black and piercing, and a look of recklessness and dissipation mars the almost perfect features.

A long mustache droops over his mouth, and his hair falls below his shoulders, and is as black as ebony.

In his belt he carries two gold-mounted revolvers, a large knife, and at his back is hung a repeating rifle of late pattern.

And it is from the lips of this last-described man that the song breaks forth, and in a voice that would win him an *encore* upon the metropolitan stage.

As though expecting that rest was near at hand the horses quicken their pace, heading toward the timber motte, which consists of hardly a score of trees grouped together.

But within their shadow the animals' instinct seemed to tell them that the grass grew rich and juicy, and a spring of clear water bubbled forth. Alas! that their instinct could not tell them that deadly danger also lay in that leafy covert!

But it is given to neither man nor beast to look into the future, and what "is to be" is like an unread book before us.

Nearer and nearer to the timber drew the two horsemen, the words of song still breaking from the lips of one, and neither seeming to know that death lurked in the shadow of the trees before them.

Nearer and nearer they drew until only half a hundred paces away, like giant sentinels of the prairie, the trees rose before them, and then both horses stopped short, with no drag upon their reins to cause them to do so.

The next instant, brighter than the soft silvery moonlight, as vivid as the glare of the lightning, and as deadly, flashed forth a red line of flame from the shadows of the timber, and with a half-uttered cry upon his lips the man upon the white horse fell heavily to the earth, while his startled steed, with a wild snort and neigh, bounded away across the prairie.

And the other—the companion of the fallen man?

Like a statue stood both horse and rider for

an instant, and then from out the timber came two men.

Both were walking, but behind each one followed a horse.

That the two men were plainsmen was evident at a glance, for they were clad in buckskin and had rough, bearded faces and long, unkempt hair.

In their hands they carried their rifles, yet warm from the death-shots that had burst from their muzzles.

As they approached, the mounted man made no effort to fly, no effort to resist.

Was he afraid that he, too, might share the fate of his comrade?

Did he fear to make a struggle for life against those two men advancing upon him?

Without a word the two approached until one bent over the prostrate form and laid his hand upon the forehead, stained with blood.

"Is he dead?"

The speaker was the one who sat like a statue upon his jet-black horse.

A hoarse laugh burst from the lips of both men, while one asked, in rude tones:

"Do you think we are fools to miss what we shoot at?"

"Yes, you'll find my bullet in his brain, and my pard's lead is deposited in his heart," unfeeling said the other borderman, while his comrade added:

"Yes, we did the work, and we will divide the chips."

Instantly the gold-mounted revolvers of the horseman flashed, as they were drawn with lightning action from the belt, and a frowning muzzle covered each one of the murderers, while from the lips of the now-aroused man came in ringing tones, as clear and distinct as had been his voice in song:

"That is your game, is it? Take that! and that!"

Two quick reports followed, and two men sunk in their tracks, almost upon the body of the man they had slain only a few minutes before.

Springing to the ground the horseman approached and bent over one and then over the other of the two who had fallen beneath his deadly aim.

Both weapons, held in the right and left hands, had been truly aimed, and their leaden messengers of death had done their fatal work.

Then the one living being, who stood there alone with those ghastly forms at his feet, glanced slowly and searchingly around the prairie, and through his set teeth came the words:

"Dead men tell no tales!"

CHAPTER II.

FOR LOVE'S SWEET SAKE.

In the broad window of a grand old home, on the coast of England, a woman stood, gazing out upon the scene spread out before her view.

When the bright sunlight fell upon the landscape and sea the view was one of beauty, and the mansion and its grounds were beautiful and picturesque; but now the sky was overcast with dull clouds, from which a dreary rain came pattering down, and the ocean was wind-lashed, and fell with heavy thud upon the beach, while its bosom bore but a single sail in sight, a small schooner beating for some haven near by.

The grounds encircling the mansion were beautiful indeed: there were fields of broad acres stretching far away, and upon all rested an air of thrift and comfort, while within the handsome structure everything gave evidence of luxuries that wealth alone could purchase and a refined taste delight in.

Still the face of the gazer from the window was sad, and the eyes were dimmed with tears, as if in sympathy with the falling rain.

It was yet a beautiful face, scarcely twenty years having passed over it, and the form was one of yielding grace and perfection in every outline.

Perhaps her mourning attire would give a reason for the sadness that rested upon every feature, showing that some one who had been very dear to her had passed from earth to the "great beyond."

"Two years ago to-day I met him; one year ago I promised to become his wife, and this was to have been our wedding-day."

"It is fitting that the heavens should weep, and all around be desolate, for even so is my heart."

"Oh, Walter! Walter, are you indeed forever gone from me?"

With a moan of intense sorrow she bowed her head in her hands, and her whole frame shook with emotion that swept over her.

But suddenly she started, for upon her ears came the rumble of wheels upon the gravel carriage drive, and a stylish vehicle, drawn by two spirited horses, and with coachman in livery, drew up at the marble stairway.

The next instant a man sprung forth and ascended to the piazza.

"It is Lord Varian; how strangely like he is to poor Walter?" murmured the maiden, and hastily drying her eyes she turned to meet her visitor.

The next instant there entered a well-dressed, elegantly-formed man, whose face was one to command respect and admiration at a glance.

Though under thirty, there was yet about him a calm dignity that caused him to seem older, and his complexion was darkened as though with exposure to the sea, or sunny lands.

With an easy grace and pleasant smile upon his fine face he advanced toward the maiden, and extended his hand.

"A dreary day for a call, Lady Geraldine but because the sun was hidden I sought the sunshine of your presence."

"A pretty speech, Lord Varian, but I fear I will only give you the blues, as the sunshine of my life seems forever to have gone from me," said the maiden, sadly.

The man started, and a shade of the rich color fled from his face; but he replied, quietly, yet with a certain subdued earnestness:

"Say not so, Lady Geraldine, for the future may yet brighten for you: at least I sincerely hope so, and every act of my life would be devoted to making you happy, if only you would allow me that pleasure."

It was the maiden's time to start now, and she became deadly pale, while in almost a whisper she said:

"One year ago to-day, Lord Varian, I was perfectly happy, for I became the promised wife of your brother Walter."

"Can this be really true? I had heard it was so rumored, and some even said, Lady Geraldine, that the mourning garb you wear was for Walter, and not your aunt who died; but, remember, I was away in India, and never saw you and my brother together; so forgive me if I have offended in offering my love to one whose heart is the sepulcher of a buried idol."

"Lord Varian, believe me you have not offended, and since meeting you I have often wished to tell you that I was engaged to your brother, but my father has urged that I should not do so."

"Indeed! he gave me his consent to speak to you of my regard for you, and I understood from him that your affections were disengaged."

"To the living yes; but to the dead always true; for though I live until my hair is as white as snow, I can never forget him to whom I gave all my love."

She spoke earnestly, and Lord Varian said, sadly:

"My brother deserved your love, Lady Geraldine, for he was a noble man, and how happy would I be could I win and wear a gem so priceless as your heart."

Suddenly the maiden turned upon him with flushed face, and eagerly she said:

"Oh, Lord Varian! do you really believe your brother Walter is dead?"

He seemed hurt for an instant, and replied:

"My wearing his title, which his death alone could bestow upon me, and my inheriting his estates, should be proof of his death, Lady Geraldine."

"Forgive me, for I meant not to offend you, and my question you did not seem to understand."

"True, there came the report of his death upon the American plains, and from his own servant I have learned how his horse came into camp, and a search being made his body, with those of two other men, had been found on the prairie, where the Indians had attacked them."

"Carlos, his servant, has told me the story over and over again, and how he buried his master in a little grove, and marked his grave with a head-board skillfully carved for him by a noted American scout, who bore the strange name of Buffalo Bill."

"To this hunter I wrote upon the subject, and received from him a letter giving me all the particulars, as Carlos had done; still, it seemed as though poor Walter could not have been so cruelly taken from me by the hands of ruthless savages, and sometimes I wonder if those who were there might not have been mistaken in the body, and your noble brother be even now a captive to the Indians."

The maiden had spoken rapidly and with intense earnestness, and her words impressed her hearer deeply.

"Lady Geraldine, you have almost inspired me with a belief that my brother may yet live, and I feel angry with myself that I have not before sifted this matter thoroughly; but I returned from India, called to inherit my brother's title and estates, and a doubt of his death never once entered my mind before, and gladly would I return to my regiment again, to prove that he yet lived."

"Now that you have suggested the thought, I will act upon it, and sail at once for America, where I will fully satisfy myself if the body that lies in that grave on the prairie is really the remains of poor Walter."

"But, alas! how can you tell?"

"Do you remember that the thumb on Walter's left hand was gone?"

"Yes; it was shot off by the accidental discharge of his gun, when a boy."

"True, and his right leg was broken, between the knee and ankle, and these marks will be sufficient by which to recognize the remains."

"I will take Carlos back with me, and thor-

oughly investigate all matters regarding the shooting of Walter, employing as my guide, this scout you refer to, Buffalo Bill, whom I learned at the club the other night, from friends of mine who have hunted upon the American plains, is one of the most remarkable frontiersmen that ever lived; believe me, now that I have determined, you shall know if my brother is really dead, or whether I can make you happy, and him, by restoring him to you."

Lady Geraldine Clyde had listened with rapt attention to every word that fell from the lips of Lord Varian Elphistone, and rising she approached and laid her tiny hand upon his arm, while she said, in her low, musical tones:

"Bring me proof that Walter is forever dead to me, and I bury my grief in that prairie grave with him, and, should you then offer me your love, I pledge you my hand; the heart, in its own time, will follow. Nay, hear me! I have within me a certain spirit of revenge, that causes me to long to know that if Walter is dead, those who killed him are punished."

I understand you, Lady Geraldine, and I pledge myself to the duty before me. Now I will return home and begin preparations for my trip, as I shall sail in a few days for America. Farewell!"

He bent over the little hand and imprinted thereon a fervent kiss, for Lady Geraldine was all in all to him, and he was willing to lay down his life, even, for love's sweet sake.

CHAPTER III.

BUFFALO BILL.

A RACE for life across the rolling prairie is fully as exciting to one who witnesses it, or participates therein, as a sea-chase, with a formidable adversary rushing on astern, sweeping your decks with iron messengers of death.

And so thought Lord Varian Elphistone, one fine afternoon, as, with four comrades, he fled across the prairie at the utmost speed of their horses, while on their trail came two score of painted savages, who believed their game almost in their hands.

A week before, having arrived at an advanced station on the railroad, accompanied by his servant, Carlos, Lord Elphistone had there engaged three guides and hunters to go with him to Fort McPherson, from which point it was his intention to start out upon the mission that had brought him to America.

Unfortunately for the English nobleman, the "guides," though acquainted with the country, were not possessed of that indomitable pluck so often found in the real frontiersman, and only a large offer in gold had tempted them to risk their lives in taking Lord Varian to McPherson, for the plain and trails were known to be closely watched by wandering bands of Indians on the war-path.

By good luck, however, the party escaped meeting with the Indians for several days, having taken unfrequented trails, and then they were suddenly surprised by a band of painted warriors, and knew that on the speed of their horses alone depended their safety.

Relying wholly upon the bordermen, Lord Varian took their advice, and away the five men dashed, driving the spurs deep into their straining animals, while the red-skins, well mounted upon comparatively fresh horses, came rapidly on, slowly gaining at every step.

Nearer and nearer drew the Indians to the fugitives, each roll of the prairie telling upon the tired horses, and Lord Varian began to fear that he had but come to the American plains to share the fate of his brother; but he was a brave man, and if brought to bay he would first prove that he held no fear of death, and if he died would die game.

Nearer and nearer came the savages, and Lord Varian unslung his repeating rifle, and glanced back over his shoulder, while he said, with determination:

"Come, do not let us burst the hearts of these poor brutes in useless flight, but, as we must fight, let us halt and have it over."

"I hain't on it, pard, an' shall let out so long as this animal's legs will work; you don't know Injuns ef you thinks you can play a bluff game on 'em," replied one of the guides who rode in advance of the Englishman.

But hardly had he spoken when there came a volley of rifle-shots from the pursuing savages, and though at long range, down went the steed of Lord Varian, with a cry almost human, while Carlos reeled and fell heavily from his saddle, clutching the rein in a dying grasp that checked his horse.

Unhurt by his fall, Lord Varian was upon his feet in an instant, and confronted his foes, while he called to his companions to rally around him.

"Can't do it, pard; our hair are val'ble," cried one of the men, unfeelingly, and they dashed rapidly on.

"Cowards!" came through the shut teeth of the nobleman, as he leveled his rifle and stood at bay, his eyes glancing sadly toward the motionless form of his servant, and then threateningly upon the coming red-skins, who were now rushing on with exultant yells.

Though unused to a life on the American prairies, Lord Varian had before fought savages

in the wilds of Australia and mountain fastnesses of India, while, a great lover of sport, he had been the crack hunter of his regiment, and had often brought down the large game of the jungles, bearding the lion in his den and the tiger in his lair.

Calm as though on dress parade, pale, yet with splendid nerve he raised his rifle to his shoulder, and once, twice, thrice, it rattled forth, and with such unerring aim, that down to the earth went one steed and two riders, a loss that at once checked the wild rush of the red-skins, who drew off with hideous yells of rage just out of immediate range, while they sent a shower of bullets flying around the brave man, one of which brought down the steed held in the death-gripe of Carlos.

Determined to follow up his temporary advantage, Lord Varian again fired, and up went a warrior's hands as he fell backward from his pony, and a hasty retreat was made to a still safer distance, while the unerring marksman began to reload the empty chambers of his rifle, but turned quickly as a clear, ringing voice broke on his ears not far distant:

"Bravo! you shoot to the queen's taste, and no mistake, my friend."

Lord Varian beheld a solitary horseman advancing toward him, or rather a person mounted on a mule, and the next instant he dismounted by the side of the nobleman, who gazed upon him with undisguised admiration.

Over six feet in height, and a perfect Apollo in form, he was dressed in an entire suit of buckskin, fancifully fringed and embroidered with beads, from the moccasins to the wide collar of his hunting-shirt.

In a broad belt he carried three revolvers and a knife, and in his hands held a silver-mounted rifle of the Evans patent, which carried thirty-four shots when loaded.

But the face of the stranger was even more striking than his form, handsome buckskin suit, and superb armament, for it was almost womanly in the perfection of its features, and this effeminate expression was added to by the masses of long, waving black hair that fell upon his shoulders and adown his back.

A strikingly handsome man, there was yet in his eyes an expression utterly fearless, and a long dark mustache and imperial gave his face a more manly look, and but half-concealed the determined, courageous mouth.

In spite of the broad sombrero of dove-colored felt that he wore his complexion was burned to the hue almost of an Indian, and there was that about him which caused Lord Varian to feel that he stood in the presence of a thorough man of the prairie, and that he had come to his rescue was evident—else, why there?

"You have come to dangerous quarters if, as I believe, you have come to my aid," said Lord Varian, almost lost in admiration at the splendid-looking man before him.

"That is just what I came for, sir; I was behind the hill yonder, and saw your cowardly companions desert you, so, as I cannot make lightning time on a mule, I ran over to aid you," said the stranger, in an easy, off-hand manner.

"And I thank you, sir; but I fear we can do little good if those fellows charge us in force."

"Never say die, is my motto, until after the funeral obsequies, and from the way you handle a rifle you can call for red-skin chips to be passed in whenever you touch trigger; still you do not look like one of our Northern plainsmen, so I judge you are from Texas," said the stranger, inquiringly.

"No, I am an Englishman; but what are those fellows about now?"

The frontiersman glanced at the Indians and said, quietly:

"They have been holding a powwow of war, and intend to circle around and then charge, so we must fortify."

"Fortify?"

"Yes, I hate it, old mule, but your life before mine," and turning to the large mule he had ridden the borderman, to the surprise of Lord Varian, sent a bullet through his brain.

With a groan the animal sunk in his tracks, and then, with an exhibition of his giant strength, the plainsman dragged the dead animal to the side of the dead steed of Lord Varian.

The animal ridden by Carlos was then hauled into position, the dead body of the poor servant also placed advantageously, and springing into the little inclosure thus made with remarkable rapidity, the plainsman began throwing up with his knife the loose dirt.

"Now I see your plan and can aid you," said Lord Varian, who had gazed in surprise at the quick movements of his companion, and the two knives were put to work with such good will that a quantity of dirt was thrown upon the dead bodies of the horses, and its excavation made a deeper pit for the two men to seek shelter in.

All this had not occupied more than five minutes, and the Indians were hastening to circle the little *impromptu* fort, and charge its brave defenders.

Soon, with terrific yells, they came, charging from the four points of the compass; but with

back to back the two men sat, and firing with perfect coolness they sent death into the coming ranks, and their repeating rifles rattled so incessantly that the red-skins again faltered, wavering and turned in flight.

"Not hurt I hope, sir?" said the plainsman, coolly, turning to his companion, for the Indians had sent a shower of bullets upon them.

"Oh, no; and you, my brave friend?"

"Am happy. Ah! there come the boys that will cause the red-skins to scatter," and the plainsman pointed over a rise in the prairie where a score of cavalry came in sight.

"Soldiers?"

"Yes, I was out scouting with them, and had ridden on ahead. I knew Captain Dangerfield would hear the firing and think I was in trouble; but, see how the red-skins are running!"

"Yes, we are in no more danger now, and I owe to you my life," and Lord Varian held forth his hand, which the plainsman grasped warmly, while he answered:

"Yes, and I would have gone under but for you, as I could not have kept them all at bay."

"Still, you came to my aid when you were out of danger, and I shall ever remember you, sir; my name is Lord Varian Elphistone."

"Indeed! I knew an Englishman once of your name; I buried him on the prairie a year ago."

"Ha! it was my brother, Lord Walter, and you are—"

"Buffalo Bill, men call me."

"Then you are the man I came to America to see. Thank Heaven, I have found you," and Lord Varian again grasped the hand of the famous scout, just as the party of cavalry dashed up to the little fort.

CHAPTER IV.

DENOUNCED.

THE smoke curled lazily up from the tops of the score of *tepees* that formed the Indian village of the great Pawnee chief, Red Heart.

Situated upon the open prairie, a view could be obtained for miles around, and the old chief was standing in front of his lodge, gazing at a horseman who was approaching at a rapid gallop.

As he drew nearer it was evident that the stranger was not an Indian, for the sunlight glistened upon the silver mounting of his saddle, and his face showed plainly that he was a white man.

Well mounted, thoroughly armed, and as if indifferent to danger he came fearlessly on, until he drew rein before the chief, who greeted him with the usual Indian salutation:

"How?"

"The chief knows me?" asked the stranger, inquiringly, while his rifle lay across the saddle ready for use.

"Yes, the Red Heart knows his pale-face brother, who was a good Medicine Man to him many moons ago," said the chief in good English, while a number of his warriors gathered around him.

"Am I not welcome to the wigwam of the Red Heart?" asked the white man.

"Yes, the Death Shot is welcome, though my warriors have fallen before his aim."

"That was long ago when the hatchet was unburied: now the Red Heart and his braves are at peace with the pale-faces and I have come to have a talk with them, for I would give them revenge upon their worst foe."

"Come, let the Death Shot come with me to my lodge, and my young men will take his horse."

As if reassured, the horseman sprung to the ground and entered the *tepee* of Red Heart, who motioned him to a seat upon a buffalo-robe and handed him a pipe to smoke.

After each had given a few whiffs the stranger said:

"My friend, the Red Heart, remembers his old foe, Buffalo Bill?"

"The Red Heart is not one to forget."

"He would have that man in his power?"

"The Red Heart is at peace with his white brothers; would the Death Shot have him prove false to his pale-face friends?"

"No, not with those on the border; but this man is a bitter foe to the Indians, and he will soon come to your camp with a companion, and then the Red Heart can take his scalp."

The Indian chief smiled grimly, but answered:

"No, the Red Heart has not a crooked tongue; he will not be the first to unbury the hatchet."

"The chief talks like a squaw; here to his camp will come his worst foe, and he can kill him, and none will know that the Red Heart has done so."

"The Death Shot will know."

"And the tongue of the Death Shot is not crooked; he would see the White Hunter die, and he will fill the lodge of the Red Heart with presents if he will kill him and his companion."

"Why does the Death Shot seek the life of his pale-face brothers?"

"Because I hate Buffalo Bill and would gladly see him die," and the man spoke with savagery, earnestness; then, after a pause, he turned to the chief, and continued:

"Let him come to your camp, and while you

talk to the Hunter I will speak to his companion, and when I give the signal your young men can seize and bind the scout; will you promise this, Red Heart?"

"The Red Heart will promise," was the calm answer, and the two walked from the tepee, the white man to dart back suddenly into its shelter, as he beheld, but a few hundred paces away, two horsemen approaching the Indian encampment.

"Let the Red Heart behold! The White Hunter and his comrade are coming," he cried, hastily.

"The Red Heart has eyes; he can see," was the calm response, and he walked forward to meet the horsemen, who just then rode up.

Dismounting, one of the horsemen offered his hand to the chief, while he said, pleasantly:

"I have come to visit my old friend, the Red Heart, and brought with me a pale-face from beyond the big water."

"The pale-face friends of the Red Heart are welcome; but, why is the Great Hunter so far from his trail?"

"I am not on the war-path, you may be certain, chief, for, from the number of braves you have around you, it would not be healthy; but I have come to ask you some questions which I know you can answer."

"The ears of the Red Heart are open."

"I am glad to hear it, chief. Now, answer me, if you remember that a pale-face stranger, and two others, were killed at a motte twenty miles to the south of here, a year ago?"

"The Red Heart remembers; it was said that my braves killed him."

"True; the stranger who was killed was the brother of my friend, here, and those slain with him were bordermen; now let the chief tell me where his young men were then?"

"They were far from here, many days' travel to the north."

"So I thought, and there were no Indians, to my knowledge, anywhere near here at the time; now I would like two of the Red Heart's young men 'o go with us to the motte on the prairie, where the dead men were buried, and they shall be paid well for their work."

"Let the Hunter come with me to the lodges of the Antelope and Running Bear; they will go with him," and the chief led the way, followed by the Hunter, in whom, ere this, the reader has doubtless recognized Buffalo Bill.

As his companion turned to follow, he heard in a distinct loud whisper, and in perfect English:

"One moment, my lord!"

Turning quickly, he beheld in the entrance to the tepee of the Red Heart, the tall form of a white man.

In surprise he turned toward him, for he had not expected to see a pale-face in that far-away Indian camp; but the man whom the chief had called by the name of Death Shot, gave him no time for thought, but said, hastily:

"A word with you, sir, and kindly step in here out of sight of yonder man."

"Yonder man, sir, is my comrade, and I may add my friend; I have nothing to hide from him," was the haughty reply of the Englishman.

The Death Shot smiled meaningly, and answered:

"You may think differently when you know him as I do—nay, my lord, be patient and I will explain, for I left the fort to follow you here and protect you from a terrible danger."

The man spoke earnestly, and with an impressiveness that caused Lord Varian to ask, anxiously:

"In Heaven's name, what do you mean?"

"First, I know that you came to America to search for the body of a brother, supposed to have been slain by the Indians about a year ago."

"Yes, that such is my duty here I have made known at the fort."

"And you have engaged the services of the famous scout, Buffalo Bill, to find the body of your brother for you, as he is said to have buried him?"

"Yes."

"And this Buffalo Bill tells you that your brother was slain by the Indians?"

"No, on the contrary, he leans to a belief that some desperadoes killed him."

"He should certainly know, my lord."

"What mean you?" asked Lord Varian, as the same meaning smile passed over the man's face.

"I repeat it, Buffalo Bill should know, above all else, who killed your unfortunate brother."

"Explain yourself, sir."

"I say Buffalo Bill knows of his death, and who killed him."

"Great God! you imply a doubt of that man that I cannot entertain, and your words seem positive that my brother is really dead, though I had hoped against hope, that I might, after all, find him alive, a captive among the Indians."

"Dismiss such a hope, my lord, for your brother is dead, as I saw him killed."

"You! you saw my brother killed?" cried Lord Varian, excitedly, coming closely to the Death Shot, and looking him squarely in the face.

"I did, my lord; I had taken refuge in the

timber upon the approach of some men, and, from my place of concealment, saw your brother and the two who accompanied him shot down in their tracks by one who lay in ambush."

"Good God! do you tell me the truth?"

"What motive have I to lie to you, my lord?"

"None, that I can see; and who was it that killed my brother?"

"A very dangerous man, and one who is feared as a desperado."

"Yet, what incentive had he to kill my poor brother?"

"One that has caused many a crime: the greed of gold, and your brother wore valuable diamonds, and had a purse well filled, as I had often seen, for I knew him well."

"You knew poor Walter, then?"

"Yes, we were often together, and yet I dare not make an attempt to save him, as in swimming a river my pistols and rifle had become wet, and I knew my death would follow; but knowing that you were being led into the same trap as your brother, I left the fort and hastened here to warn you, as I learned you were coming to the camp of Red Heart."

"From my heart I thank you; but who is it you would warn me against, and what have I to fear?"

Like lightning, the man's hand dropped upon the butt of a revolver, and the next instant, stepping out of the tepee the muzzle-covered the heart of Buffalo Bill, who at that moment approached, accompanied by Red Heart and several warriors.

Then in loud tones he cried:

"Lord Varian, there stands your foe, and the murderer of your brother!"

"Liar!" shouted Buffalo Bill, and, unheeding the pistol leveled at him, he sprung forward toward his accuser; but Red Heart gave a signal to his braves, and hurling themselves upon the scout he was dragged heavily to the ground, and after a fierce struggle, securely bound, Lord Varian, in his amazement and grief at what he had heard not knowing what to say, or how to act.

With a bitter laugh the Death Shot glanced down at the bound scout, and cried:

"Ha! ha! ha! Buffalo Bill, my handsome desperado, who holds the winning hand now?"

A shadow seemed suddenly to flit over the recumbent form of Buffalo Bill, and a clear voice said, in ringing tones:

"I hold the winning hand, Royal Keene!"

Every eye was fastened upon the speaker, and they beheld the slender, yet graceful and agile form of a young girl!

She was standing across the body of Buffalo Bill, her form bent forward, and both arms outstretched, while in each hand she held a gold-mounted revolver, of small but exquisite workmanship.

One muzzle covered the heart of the man she had addressed as Royal Keene, and the other was pointed at Red Heart, who stood just at the side of Death Shot.

She was fancifully attired in leggins, short skirt, and tight-fitting bodice, and her belt yet contained a long knife, while a small repeating rifle was slung at her back.

Her head was sheltered by a black sombrero, encircled by a gold cord, and ornamented with a plume upon the left side, which was looped up with a pair of gold miniature cavalry sabers.

Her form was perfect, her face beautiful in spite of its reckless boldness, and the eyes had a dangerous light in them as they rested upon the white face of Royal Keene, from whose lips broke two words, as though in deadly fear:

"Wild Nell!"

CHAPTER V.

WILD NELL.

WHEN the name of Wild Nell passed the lips of Royal Keene, or Death Shot, as the Indians called him, it was evident that the woman was not only well known to him, but to Buffalo Bill and also the red-skins, the latter seeming somewhat startled by her sudden and unexpected presence in their midst.

"Yes, Royal Keene, I am here to trump your little game of deviltry," said the woman, in calm, threatening tones, and her slender fingers still lightly pressed upon the triggers, and both Red Heart and Death Shot seemed to fully realize that their lives hung but by a slender thread; but the white man's reckless nature came to his aid, and without the tremor of a muscle at his danger, he said, with a harsh laugh:

"Why, Nell, what a star you would make on the stage; but your acting is dangerous here, so put up those playthings."

The woman hesitated and her hands slightly trembled, increasing the danger of the two men at whom the muzzles pointed.

"Put them up, I say!"

The voice of Royal Keene was now stern and commanding, and there was an evil glitter in his dark eyes as they looked full in the face of the woman, who now seemed visibly affected, for a tremor ran through her form, and as she lowered the weapons, she cried:

"Royal, I cannot aim at your heart; no, a thousand times, no."

Her head drooped upon her bosom and she

stepped back from her threatening attitude, while her hands hung limp at her side, and in a voice barely audible she said, plaintively:

"Bill, you are doomed; I can do no more."

All, even the red warriors, seemed surprised at the sudden change that had come over the woman, and Buffalo Bill and Lord Varian wondered at the strange influence of the man over her, an influence that seemed to hold her wholly in his power, and prove that some dark mystery lay behind it.

As for Royal Keene, he showed no emotion, not even elation at his triumph; but again turning to his bound prisoner, he said:

"You see, Buffalo Bill, that I do hold trumps against you in this game, and I tell you frankly you have but a few moments to live."

"What! would you kill me as you would a mad dog?" asked the Scout, indignantly.

"Ay, as you have often killed the poor red-man, and even as you did the brother of this man, who would have shared a like fate but for me; ay, I will kill you without mercy."

"No, I cannot permit this to be done, for I must first know that he is guilty of what you accuse him, which I doubt decidedly; if guilty, the laws of your land, not you, must deal with him, and I warn you not to lay hands upon him."

It was Lord Varian that spoke, and there was that in his face which proved he would maintain his words; but, with an angry brow, Royal Keene turned upon him:

"I tell you, Sir Englishman, that here on the border we take the law in our own hands, and Judge Lynch shall settle with Buffalo Bill."

"Judge Lynch as a magistrate, then, but not you."

"Ha! ha! that is good indeed; but you mistake me, my lord, for Judge Lynch in America is a stout rope and the nearest tree."

"Ah, I comprehend your Americanism now; but I repeat it, the Scout shall not be dealt with except in full fairness."

"And I tell you he shall die within the hour, savagely said Royal Keene, and he dropped his hand meaningly upon the butt of his revolver.

"The pale-face is a fool; does he think the Red Heart has no tongue?"

Royal Keene started at the deep tones of the Indian chief, and turned quickly toward him, as though to question his meaning, and in the dignified manner of the warrior he continued:

"The pale-face Scout is a mighty brave, and he has led the armies of the Great Father into the lands of my people, beating them back further and further toward the setting sun."

"His eye is like the eagle and his hand like the rock, when he has met my warriors in battle, and many scalps have hung from his belt; but he has not a crooked tongue, and he is not a coyote to sneak away at the sight of a man or report of a rifle, and my braves honor him."

"And listen: when my people were at war with the pale-faces, the Sioux came to my village and stole my only child, the Star Eye of the Pawnees, and the white Scout met them in battle and took her from them and brought her to my wigwam, though my young men were on his trail hunting for his scalp."

"Has the Death Shot heard enough, or does he wish me to put my braves upon his trail, that he comes to my village and asks me to turn my back upon my friend?"

The face of Royal Keene grew dark and his eyes glittered maliciously at the quiet but telling speech of the Red Heart, whom he now knew had deceived him, and had never intended to harm Buffalo Bill.

Seeing, by the manner of the Indians, that they sided with their chief, he said, fiercely:

"Bah! the Red Heart talks like a squaw; but let him protect the Scout now, for my day will yet come to take his life, and, old chief, my belt will yet be heavy with the scalps of your warriors."

Without another word the Death Shot turned on his heel and walked toward his horse, which was lariated upon the prairie not far distant.

A few of the younger braves seemed anxious to follow him, but Red Heart called them back, while Wild Nell bent over Buffalo Bill and quickly severed the rawhide bonds that bound his hands and feet, and Lord Varian walked away, his breast filled with conflicting emotions.

Springing to his feet the Scout said, pleasantly:

"Nell, I owe you perhaps my life, for there is no telling what that villain would have done; but what is he to you, may I ask?"

"Oh, Bill, do not ask me," burst passionately from the girl's lips, and, as if to change the subject, the Scout asked:

"But what brought you out here alone on the prairies? I know you know not fear, and are a good borderwoman, yet this is running a great risk."

"I came, Bill, to save you, for I knew that Royal Keene was plotting against your life, and intended to get the Red Heart to kill you."

"But why should he seek my life, Nell?"

"You have thwarted him on several occasions, I believe, and with you out of the way he would hold greater power on the border."

"But how know you all this, Nell?"

A pained expression passed over the woman's face, and she answered in deep tones:

"I know it as well as I know that Royal Keene wrecked my life, Bill; but enough; I came to save you, and, like a coward, under his eye I faltered, when I should have sent a bullet through his heart; but the time shall yet come when my nerve shall be as iron, and my aim shall be true."

"Ah, Nell, yours should be a different life from the one you lead; there are many men at the post who would gladly make you their wife if you would love them."

"Love! speak not to me of love, for I hate the word; it is poison in my ears, and like a canker-worm in my heart; but now you know that you have a bitter foe in Royal Keene, watch him."

Without a word more she turned away, and going to a pony lariated out upon the prairie lashed away at full speed, just as Lord Varian approached Buffalo Bill.

"Cody, forgive me, if for an instant I doubted you; now I feel that that man only had set a plot to get rid of you for some reason known but to you and himself," and Lord Varian extended his hand.

"I hold no grudge, my lord; you are a stranger in a strange land, and having lost a brother here know not whom to trust," and Buffalo Bill grasped the extended hand, while the Englishman continued:

"You Americans are a wonderful people, Cody; a wonderful people indeed; but, tell me, who was that strange woman?"

"She is known as Wild Nell, my lord, and there ends my knowledge of her, except that she lives alone in a cabin near the Post, is a dangerous hand with rifle, revolvers and knife, can ride like an Indian, and though admired by many seems to have no preference for any one."

"Yet that man, Royal Keene, seemed to possess almost a magnetic influence over her."

"Yes, and that is what I cannot understand, for I believed he hardly knew her, and now am convinced that beneath it all lies some deep mystery, a mystery I shall yet fathom, for I wish to know more of this Mr. Keene."

"And who is he?"

"He has a mining interest of some kind in Colorado, it is said, and has been a kind of volunteer scout, and a good one, for the Indians gave him the name of Death Shot, on account of his deadly aim."

"He is a handsome, dashing fellow, and has evidently received an education."

"So I believe, my lord, and as he has now taken such an interest in me I am determined to find out more regarding him, so shall at once put a couple of Indians on his trail, while we remain with old Red Heart to-night and go on to the motte to-morrow."

"I am under your guidance, Cody," said Lord Varian, and he turned away to watch the squaws preparing the evening meal for their braves, while Buffalo Bill went in search of the chief Red Heart.

Ten minutes after three Indian warriors mounted their horses and struck off across the prairie, slowly following the trail of the Death Shot.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GRAVE IN THE MOTTE.

WITH the early morn, and after a substantial breakfast—for the Scout always traveled well provided with provisions—three horsemen rode out of the Indian camp and struck a trail to the southward, followed by the Indian village, which the chief intended moving toward the head-waters of the Republican river.

The three who left the village were Buffalo Bill, Lord Varian and Red Heart, the latter having determined to accompany his pale-face guests as far as the lonely motte where were buried the remains of Lord Walter Elphistone.

A ride of a few hours brought the small party to the motte, where one moonlight night, a year before, the reader beheld a tragedy enacted, a triple death almost in the shadow of the timber.

As they drew near, Buffalo Bill said in a low voice, as though recalling the remembrance with sadness:

"I knew your brother well, Lord Varian, for I gave him his first lessons in prairie-craft, and he was such an apt pupil that he was wont to go often alone on a hunt."

"When killed, however, he had two companions, I believe?" asked Lord Varian, gazing with deep interest upon the small grove of timber they were approaching.

"Two dead bodies were found near him, and they were evil characters well known on the border; all three were scalped and stripped of most of their clothing, and this caused the report that Indians had done the deed.

"As soon as I heard of the sad affair, through an old guide, I came here and buried the bodies, and some time afterward brought a headboard I had carved out with my knife, and placed it at your brother's grave; but though I made diligent search at the time, I could never discover Indian traces near the motte, and at the time of the murder, there were no red-skin

bands seen in the vicinity, so I always believed that white men had done the deed and tried to leave the impression that the Pawnees had been the perpetrators."

"And the motive?"

"Was robbery, of course, for your brother unfortunately carried about with him considerable money, wore diamond studs, sleeve-buttons, and a ring of great value."

"It was wrong in him to do so, and I agree with you that they cost him his life, if he lies dead yonder; but we will soon know."

A ride of a few minutes more brought them to the motte, and beneath a large tree Buffalo Bill pointed out three graves, one with an ingeniously carved board at the head of it.

To this one Lord Varian advanced, and dismounting, stood with uncovered head before it, while two Indian warriors came out of a thicket near by and joined the party.

They were the same who had left the camp of Red Heart the evening before.

"And the Antelope, where is he?" asked the Scout, in the Pawnee language.

"The Antelope follows the trail of the Death Shot toward the setting sun," answered one of the braves.

"Ah! he has doubtless gone toward his mine in Colorado; did the Death Shot come here?" asked Buffalo Bill.

In answer the Indian turned and pointed at the ground near the grave, and understanding his gesture the Scout stepped forward and looked closely around him.

"Yes, here is the track of his horse, and, my lord, look there!"

The nobleman turned quickly at the loud tone of Buffalo Bill, and his eye fell upon the other side of the grave, which had lately been disturbed.

With his long knife Buffalo Bill quickly threw aside the earth and soon came to a small cavity, from which it was evident that a small package of some kind had been taken.

"This looks decidedly suspicious, my lord, and if I mistake not, we are on the trail of your brother's murderer."

"I believe you are right; now let us see if poor Walter is really buried here," and he turned his eyes upon the inscription on the carved head-board, on which had been skillfully cut:

"LORD WALTER ELPHISTONE,
OF ENGLAND.

"Killed near this spot, 18—."

With a hatchet he took from his saddle, and the knives of the Indians who aided him, the dirt was quickly thrown from the grave, and soon the body was reached.

The skeleton only remained, for the flesh had mingled with the earth; but the bones were to tell the story whether Lord Walter Elphistone had been buried there.

Tenderly the Scout raised the skeleton hand, and held it up.

It was the left hand and devoid of a thumb.

Thus far it is correct; now the bone of the left leg, which I told you was broken when he was a youth," said Lord Varian, almost in a whisper.

The Scout took up the skeleton leg, and that corroborated the story of the thumbless left hand; there was no doubt but that the grave contained the remains of Lord Walter Elphistone, who had met a violent death in a land far away from his own England, and the beautiful Lady Geraldine had indeed to mourn her lover dead.

With white face and quivering form the brother turned away, for before him lay all that was left of the one he had most dearly loved, and gladly would he, in the nobleness of his nature, relinquish his proud title and estates, ay, and even the love of the Lady Geraldine, to restore Lord Walter to life.

While Lord Varian stood gazing out upon the prairie, Buffalo Bill gathered the bones together and placed them in a blanket, which was strapped on the back of one of the Indian ponies, for transportation to the fort, where a coffin would be provided to carry the remains to England, for burial in the Elphistone family tomb.

"Now, my lord, I will leave you to return to the fort with these two Indian warriors, while I follow on the trail of Royal Keene, for I am determined to find out what brought him to this grave."

"Very well, Cody, and I will await you at the fort, for I have now another duty to perform in punishing my brother's murderer."

After a short rest the party left the motte, Lord Varian and the Indians returning toward the fort, and Buffalo Bill setting out alone on the trail of the Death Shot and the Indian who had followed him.

It is along with the Scout that I will ask the reader to go.

For some hours after leaving the motte Buffalo Bill continued on at an easy gallop, his splendid horse, Brigham, showing no signs of fatigue at the miles he cast behind him, and the trail plainly visible to the experienced eyes of the Scout, especially as the Indian warrior on the track of the Death Shot had taken pains to leave as broad a trace as possible.

Toward the evening of the second day the Scout approached the hills, at a point where he knew there had once been a populous mining camp, but which was now almost wholly deserted, on account of the earth not "panning out" as had been expected it would.

Here and there, scattered through the hills, Buffalo Bill had heard that a miner had remained hoping against hope that a rich yield of the precious yellow metal would reward him yet for his days of toil.

And in these hills it was said that the man known as Death Shot had a mine in which he kept a man or two at work, and as he seemed always to have money it was believed that his lead at least paid him a revenue.

As he reached the foot-hills and began the ascent, Brigham suddenly gave a loud snort, which told the Scout, as plain as words could have done, that there was something ahead to be on the alert for.

With his rifle in hand and his eyes bent searching on all sides, Buffalo Bill urged his horse again forward at a slow pace, and the animal advanced with caution into a small canyon, when he came suddenly in sight of an object lying before him a hundred paces.

Drawing nearer to it, the Scout recognized at a glance the dead pony that had been ridden by the Indian warrior Antelope.

A bullet wound was in the animal's head showing the cause of his death, and his trap pings yet remained upon him.

"Now to find the Antelope, whom I fear harm has befallen," muttered the Scout, and with every nerve on the alert, he advanced up the canyon, Brigham still showing signs of uneasiness.

"Ah!"

The single expression was caused by the keen eyes of the Scout falling suddenly upon the form of a man lying upon the hillside.

In an instant he was beside him, and he saw that it was the Antelope, yet still living.

Placing his flask of liquor to the Indian's lips he gave him a draught and it temporarily revived him, though it was evident that he was beyond all aid as a bullet wound pierced his brawny breast.

But the dark eyes opened, stared for a moment, and recognizing Buffalo Bill, the Antelope said, in a low tone:

"Antelope great brave, but he die now and go to happy hunting-grounds."

"And who killed the Antelope?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"The Death Shot; bad pale-face."

"I believe you; and he shot you, did he?"

"Death Shot lay on trail and shoot pony; Antelope run on Death Shot here, and he kill me, too; then Death Shot laugh and go way."

"I'll change that laugh for him yet," muttered the Scout, and he examined the wound of the Indian, who said, faintly:

"No good now; Antelope will die, but he great brave."

"Yes, and your people shall know he died like a chief; when did the Antelope see the Death Shot?"

"When the sun was yonder," and he tried to point toward the eastern horizon, but the effort was too much for him, and while the agony he suffered caused not a groan, he broke forth in chanting his wild death-song.

With folded arms Buffalo Bill stood near him, his handsome face now stern and determined, destroying the usually effeminate look that rested upon it, and as he gazed upon the dying savage he had a wicked, revengeful look in his dark eyes that betokened no good to Royal Keene.

Gradually the death-song grew fainter and fainter, until the lips ceased to move and the Indian warrior was forever at rest, for his soul had struck the trail leading to the happy hunting-grounds of his people.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MINER'S SECRET.

FOR some moments after the death of Antelope Buffalo Bill remained in silence, for, though often mingling with strange and violent death-scenes in the wild and adventurous life he led, he was not callous to human suffering, even though the sufferer was one of a hated race, whom he had often tracked to kill; but then that was in war, and it is said at times that

"War is a virtue—
Weakness a sin."

Folding the blanket of the dead brave around him, and making a couch of his trappings, Buffalo Bill placed the body in a crevice of the earth, and with his knife cast earth above it, thus forming a grave.

"Now, Brigham, we will see what there is ahead to interest us," said the Scout, mounting his faithful horse, who had been making a rich repast off of the juicy grass that grew in the canyon.

After a short search the trail of Royal Keene was found, leading on into the hills, and following it the Scout continued on until nightfall, when he went into camp.

But with the first dawn of day he was again

on the trail, and in a few hours came to a halt at a rugged hillside.

It was the old mining camp, which in its golden days he had several times visited; but now upon all was a scene of desolation and desolation.

A few rickety old shanties yet remained, but they held no occupants, and not a sign of a human being could be seen around.

And here, too, the trail seemed to end, for no trace of the iron-shod hoofs could be seen leading elsewhere.

Before him on the hillside was a ruined shanty, and into this the Scout rode and dismounted. Before him was a tunnel-like cave leading back into the mountain, and the entrance to which was concealed by a canvas covering which had once done duty as an army tent.

Hitching his horse within, Buffalo Bill looked to his arms, and boldly, though cautiously stepped within the cave.

But all was darkness beyond, and he at first seemed to dread striking a match, as it would place him in full view should an enemy be concealed back in the dark recesses.

After a pause he groped his way forward on his hands and knees until he had gone a considerable distance, and then he struck a match.

The light showed him that the tunnel continued on, and large enough for a horse to pass through, and then he knew that it was by that route the Death Shot had gone, thereby destroying his trail.

"I'm better on foot here than mounted," he muttered, and now continued on by the light of matches which he struck from time to time.

After going some distance he knew that the tunnel was turning off to the right, and just here he paused, as several different passageways were visible, leading off in various directions, and he knew not which one to take.

"Guess I'll toss up for luck," he said, half in earnest, and while hesitating what to do, there came to his ears a distinct groan.

"Ah! I am about to make a discovery, but I hope I'll not discover more than I can handle," he muttered, and he moved forward slowly in the direction of the sound, which was now momentarily repeated.

He had gone but a short distance when he felt that he was in the presence of a human being, though he dare not strike a match to see.

"Who is here in distress?" he asked, as the pitiful moaning was heard only a few paces away.

At the sound of his voice the groaning ceased, and in faint tones came the reply:

"Oh, if you are human, take me out of this hell of misery."

Instantly Buffalo Bill lighted a match, and there before him lay a man, his hands pressed upon his side, and red with the life-blood that oozed through them from a ghastly wound.

"My good fellow, I will willingly carry you from this, if you will only show me the way," and he bent over the wounded man.

"My torch lies yonder; there, now light it and raise me up."

The Scout did as directed, and lighting the pine knot, which served as a torch, he turned and carefully raised the man in his arms, and under his direction bore him through the tunnel, by a different route from the one he had come.

A walk of half a hundred yards and daylight shone ahead, and the next moment they came out of the cavernous passage into a stoutly built log cabin, built against the side of the hill.

That it was the home of the miner, for such he was, was evident, as a cot of skins was in one corner, a few cooking utensils stood on the large hearth, and a rifle and pistols hung on a rack near the door, which was opposite the cave.

There was a window in the cabin, only crevices in between the logs to give light, and the stout door was closed and barred.

Placing the man upon the cot Buffalo Bill unbarred and threw the door open, and the bright sunlight streamed within.

"Now, my man," and he brought his flask into requisition, "drink some of this and it will refresh you, and then I will look at your wound and see what I can do for you," said the Scout, cheerfully.

"It is no use; his knife went deep in here; but are you not Buffalo Bill, the Army Scout?"

"Yes."

"I have seen you at McPherson and also at Cheyenne: I am glad you have come, for I shall be revenged on the man who has placed me here."

"Now to your wound, and we will talk afterward."

"It's no use, pard, for I'm done for; he strikes with an iron hand, and my chips is called for; but it will better my dying hour to know that he is circumvented in his deviltry."

"To whom do you refer?" asked the Scout, though he felt that he could answer his own question correctly.

"I refer to that imp o' sin, Royal Keene."

"I thought so."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes; I followed his trail to this mine, and left some more of his red work in a grave behind me."

"Is that so? Well, he's done for me, and no mistake. You see, he is the superintendent of this mine."

The Scout smiled, for the mine looked little like needing a superintendent, and seeing it, the miner continued:

"It do seem funny, I'll allow, pard, but the joke hain't all visible yet; you see, as much as I know o' the case, the boss was sent out here by those who didn't want him in St. Louis, and was paid so much for workin' this old mine, which never did pan out good. Well, he hired me to do the workin', and I got enough to make it pay a leetle, until three days ago I struck it rich."

"What?" asked the Scout, in surprise.

"True, I struck it richer than a bank, and there's heaps o' the yaller metal back in that hole you took me out of, for there's a little creek runs underground, and the dust is thar thick and no mistake."

"You surprise me."

"I surprised myself, pard, and I was runnin' over to tell the boss, when up he come and I let him into the secret, and told him as how his old uncle in St. Louis would be delighted, even if he was what you call a *millionaire*; you see I know the family, for the old man and I was cronies in the long ago in California flush days."

"I fear you are talking too much; wait until I dress your wound and you have rest," said the Scout, kindly.

"I tell yer 'tain't no use, Bill; I'm a passin' rapid toward Jordan, an' ef I don't let loose my tongue-tackle, I'll git acrost afore I can sarcumvent that devil, Royal Keene, and he's up to dirty work, I tell yer."

"I must talk, for I'm bound on revenge for the trick he served me."

"I will listen, then, my friend."

"That's what I calls on yer to do, an' yer've got to do some workin' to revenge me, too, you bet. Now, as I was sayin', the boss has a rich uncle in St. Louis, who has got a mighty angel-like gal, an' says Royal to me, says he:

"Buck"—you see as how my name is Buck, leastwise that hain't it, for I are a liar, but I'll let it go at that, an' I judge Gabriel better call me by it when he toots his horn at Judgment, for my *real* name I didn't act right by when I was young, and I don't want no such a feller as I be to be buried under the name my good father and mother had; bless 'em, they have gone, too, and I guesses as now I helped to hurry 'em to their grave."

The tears came in the staring eyes as he recalled his parents, and the Scout seemed deeply moved, as he gazed on the flushed, feverish face, and held the rough hand in his own.

After a moment the miner continued:

"But I'm off the trail, Bill; I was telling you about Anton Melville, the uncle o' the boss o' this mine; we was boys together, and Anton pulled me out o' the mill-race one day when I was hastenin' like ther mischief to Judgment, and I never forgot him for it, though my life has been a leetle rough since them days."

"Well, Royal says to me, says he:

"'You've struck it rich then, hev yer, Buck?'

"Says I to Royal, I says:

"'I hev that.'

"'Good' says he; 'then I'm a made man and old Melville shall not know the mine ever panned out a red cent, for he believed it worthless when he sent me here four years ago.'

"Says I:

"'Boss, I guesses as how the old man will know.'

"'And how will he know?' he axed, and turned on me quick.

"'Waal, I'll tell him,' was my outspoken remark.

"He turned white as a ghost, Bill; but he didn't say nothin', only told me to show him the lead I had struck, and like a fool I went back into the tunnel with him and showed him the heaps o' dust, an' his eyes jist glittered like a snake's, an' I then seen my danger, for I'd left the shootin'-irons in ther cabin here."

"Well, he was on me in an instant, shoutin' like a wild man:

"'You'll tell, will yer, you cursed fool?'

"'I'm no child, Bill, but that devil has more strength than one man oughter have an' be human, and he held me in his arms an' driv his knife in here twice; you sees the holes the blade made.'

"I dropped down, an' fearin' he would strike again I played awful dead, and he looked over the lead, mutterin' to himself about goin' to St. Louis and buying the old man for a song, and he do sing well, I'll allow, an' then comin' back and workin' the mine for himself; but that wasn't all he said, for he threatened to have the deeds o' this mine in his name if he had to kill old Melville and marry the daughter."

"The villain!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, indignantly.

"He are worse than that, Bill, and you see how I will be happy if I sarcumvent him, even if I be dead."

Buffalo Bill did not exactly see it in that light, but he understood the old miner's reasoning, and that was sufficient.

"Buck, I promise you faithfully to go to St. Louis, if need be, and not a dollar of benefit shall Royal Keene ever get from this mine, and when I strike him hardest I'll remember you, for it is life and death between that man and myself."

"You do me proud to hear you say so, Bill; but he are a man every bit o' him, so look out; whar he aims a bullet it goes and no mistake, and he can out-Injun a Injun on cunning, and he's game clean through."

"I know him, and I gives you warning with death a-creeping over me."

"I thank you, Buck, and I will be careful, for I well know he is no common man; but now, old fellow, tell me if I can do anything for you?"

"Nary; the old folks is dead, and I guess my brothers and sisters do not wish to be reminded of me, for I brought only misery and shame upon them."

Buffalo Bill turned upon the speaker with surprise, for his voice had suddenly grown stronger, and he had wholly dropped the dialect of the border.

"Yes," he continued, "I was a hard case, and went to the bad, in spite of all that was around me to make out of me a new man."

"I drank hard, gambled, and, it is the old story, Bill—I took a life, and fled to save my own."

"Yes, there is one to whom you can bear a message, or send one; she was the one woman I ever loved, and she loved me."

"After my flight her father forced her to marry a rich man; here is her likeness and name; mine is beneath it."

But he had not the strength to take from around his neck a miniature likeness set in gold, and the Scout cut the leather thong that bound it, and placed it in the hands of the dying miner.

It was the picture of a young girl, with large sad blue eyes, and a face of rare beauty; upon the reverse side of the gold case was engraved

"ALFRED BUCKNER

"TO
MAUD WILLIS.

"St. Louis, October 1st, 18—."

The miner turned his burning eyes an instant upon the young face, and said quickly and in boarste tones:

"Take it, Bill."

After a long pause, he continued:

"Any one in St. Louis, that is those of a quarter of a century ago, will tell you who Maud Willis married; give her this, Bill, and tell her Alf Buckner never married, and died with this by him."

His features worked convulsively, and after a spasm of pain he seemed to rest easier and dropped off to sleep.

For a long time Buffalo Bill sat by his side, noticing that his sands of life were rapidly running out, and then he arose and paced the floor, more impressed by the sad scene than he cared to admit.

For a long time he walked to and fro, until the shades in the little valley lengthened as the day grew old.

Bill!"

The Scout started, and advanced to the cot and bent over the dying man.

The eyes were sunken now, their brightness had gone, and the voice was very weak.

The Scout raised the hand of the dying miner, now clammy with the death-sweat.

"I'm going over the river, Bill; you'll follow without fail."

Another word trembled on the lips but it was never uttered, for the icy chill of death touched the heart and stilled forever its beating.

Deeply impressed the scout gazed down upon the calm dead face; but the next instant he was upon his feet, like a tiger at bay, for there hung in his ears the threatening words:

"Buffalo Bill, your time has come!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BORDER DUEL.

ERE the sound of the threatening voice, that had surprised Buffalo Bill in the miner's cabin, had died away, his hands grasped his rifle which he had placed in the cot by his side.

Through the open doorway, just about ten feet from him, he beheld a horseman, a rifle in hand pointed straight at him.

That horseman was Royal Keene and his face was stormy with passion, and in his eyes was plainly a determination to kill.

His enemy held him at an advantage, for the Scout knew that his slightest movement to defend himself would bring the fatal shot, and he well knew that Royal Keene deserved the name of Death Shot.

And it was that advantage that caused Royal Keene, like the cat with the mouse, to momentarily play with the man he intended to kill, but Buffalo Bill thought with lightning rapidity, and though he remained as still as a statue, his eyes flashed about him for some vantage, or means of escape.

In an instant he saw it; a chance and yet a slight one, yet any risk for life was better than a certainty of death.

As he had faced about, still seated upon the cot, his left foot was thrust forward, and its toe was now touching the open door; then with a sudden impulse he sent the door to with a bang.

There came the shot immediately, and the bullet tore off the edge of the heavy door, but it saved the life of Buffalo Bill, who instantly threw the heavy bar in place and then sprung to a crack in the cabin, rifle in hand.

But, Royal Keene saw at a glance his danger, and had at once driven the spurs into the flanks of his horse and dashed out of sight around a bend in the hill.

As if making up his mind to his course of action, as soon as he discovered that he could not get a shot at his enemy, Buffalo Bill lighted the pine torch and darted back into the tunnel.

He readily found his way back through the tunnel, and in five minutes made his exit into the tumble-down shanty by which he had entered.

His faithful horse gave a low neigh of delight at sight of him, and the next moment the Scout was in the saddle, for he had no desire to be cooped up in a hole in the hill, as he did not know how many companions might be with the Death Shot.

As he reached the open hillside he gave a sigh of relief, and muttered:

"Now I am free, and will meet him with pleasure, and may the best man win."

But it did not seem as though the Death Shot was anticipating, or desiring an open field meeting with his adversary, for nowhere could he be seen, and darkness was coming rapidly on.

"Come, old fellow, I'll give you your supper and water, for you deserve it, and then I'll scout around on foot and see what that devil is after," said Buffalo Bill, talking half-aloud to his noble horse as was his wont.

After a short search he found good water and grass, and removing the saddle and bridle from his horse lariated him out to feed.

It was now dark, and after a light lunch the Scout shouldered his rifle and started cautiously forward upon a reconnaissance.

He had gone but a short distance when there appeared before him a red glare, and in a few moments more he came in full sight of the miner's cabin in flames.

Cautiously he crept nearer and nearer and then looked on, hoping to see Royal Keene come out in the light from some hiding-place.

"He evidently thinks I am in the cave and will smoke me out," he muttered, and with the patience of an Indian he sat down to wait for a sight of his enemy.

But the cabin burned down and the flames died out, and the wary Death Shot had not shown himself.

"Well, I'll not lose a night's rest on your account, Mr. Keene, but return to the canyon and in the morning strike your trail."

So saying, he went back to the little valley where he had left Brigham, and wrapping himself in his blankets was soon fast asleep.

With the daydawn he was upon his feet and mounting his horse rode toward the cave in the hillside.

The ashes still held a few smoldering coals, but no sign of life was around, and in one heap he recognized the charred bones of the miner.

"He's cremated old Buck, that's certain," said the Scout, sadly, and he rode around the hillside to the ruined shanty that covered the other entrance to the tunnel.

Still no trace of his enemy could be found, and making a wide circuit around the base of the hill he soon crossed the trail of an iron-shod hoof, leading away from the deserted mines.

"It is his track, and made last night; he has a long start of me but I will follow him," said the Scout to himself, and he urged his horse on in the trail left by the steed of the Death Shot.

The trail led to the northward toward Fort Sedgwick, but then branched off eastward in the direction of McPherson, and Buffalo Bill took no particular pains now to follow the track of the man he pursued, as he felt certain that he had fearlessly returned to the Post.

It was a long ride, but Brigham was a good traveler, and carried his master safely to his destination.

The sun went down when the Scout was some miles from the Post, and only the saloons and gambling hells were open when he rode along the gloomy street toward the cabin where he expected to find Lord Varian.

As he was passing by a brightly-lighted saloon, which he knew to be one of the worst dens on the border, the Scout suddenly heard voices raised in anger, and from the words of the speakers it was evident that a fight was imminent.

"I should know that voice," he said, as he drew rein and listened for an instant, while there came to his ears in clear, boyish tones the words:

"He insulted the girl, and she's my sister, and if he don't fight me he's a coward."

Instantly Buffalo Bill threw himself from his

horse, hitched him to a post near by, and entered the saloon, just as a deep voice cried:

"You've got to fight the boy, or me, so choose between us."

The next moment Buffalo Bill stood in the doorway, but the excitement was so great that his coming was not noticed.

It was a long, narrow room, rude in structure, and with a bar extending across the further end of it, with two rough-looking men standing behind it, and indifferently surveying the scene.

In the end nearest the doorway on the street were tables and chairs, a few of them occupied with men too well accustomed to scenes of violence and bloodshed to be disturbed at their drink by a war of words; when the time came for action they would move out of range, but not before.

There were present nearly half a hundred wild-looking men, a few soldiers from the fort, and several flashily-attired individuals who were well known as "sports," or professional gamblers.

But the center of attraction as the Scout stood gazing on, was a youth of perhaps nineteen, with slender form, well-dressed, and wearing a slouch hat that shaded his features.

His right hand rested upon the butt of a pistol, his eyes were flashing and his mouth was set with determined recklessness, which his light mustache failed to hide.

Before him, and also in an attitude of defense, stood Lord Varian, cool yet decided.

"He says he didn't insult yer sister, and he won't fight a boy," cried one of the men, who, apparently a peacemaker, was secretly urging on a combat.

"A boy, am I? Well, I'll prove to him that I can act a man's part," cried the youth, indignantly.

"I didn't know the gal had a brother," said one present.

"Well, you know it now, and one who is determined to punish her insulter," responded the young man, his hand still resting threateningly upon his pistol.

"My boy, if you have quarrel against me, we will settle it elsewhere; I am no advocate for a bar-room brawl," and Lord Varian attempted to move toward the door, but half a dozen burly forms confronted him, and one, who appeared to act as leader, cried:

"No, pard, it is fight or back down out here on the border, and ef you fight and kill's the boy, your trouble's jist begun, and ef yer backs, why then we'll make it lively for yer."

Lord Varian glanced around him as if to catch a friendly face; but the soldiers, the only ones who appeared to know him, looked away, for they dreaded the crowd there assembled too much to aid him.

"Men, I am not to be bullied into doing that which I do not care to do, so stand aside, for I pass out of here."

There was a certain ring in the nobleman's voice that proved that he would be a dangerous man when brought to bay, and a few knew it; but the rest were so blinded by drink, that they failed to see they might catch a Tartar, and moved forward, their hands on their revolvers, and, brave in their numbers, to at once push matters to a crisis.

"Gentlemen, you are too fast by far!"

All turned quickly at the cool, cutting tones, and a dozen voices cried in chorus:

"Buffalo Bill!"

"Yes, I am Buffalo Bill, and just in time to prevent a disagreeable scene, for that gentleman is my friend, and the man who raises hand against him has to fight me."

There was not a man present, with one or two exceptions, who did not know the Scout, and they shrank back at the thought of coming to close quarters with him, and several said, in an apologetic tone:

"We didn't know he was a pard o' yours, Bill."

"Well, you know it now," and turning to Lord Varian, who seemed greatly relieved at his coming, he continued:

"Will you go with me, my lord?"

"Willingly, Cody; I dropped in here to see something of one of your border drinking-saloons, and this youth followed me, accusing me of insulting his sister, and demanding that I should fight a duel with him here, an invitation I decidedly refused," said the nobleman, in a half-amused tone.

Just as Buffalo Bill was about to reply, and many present seemed to anticipate what he would say, and were moving toward the bar, a burly, heavily-bearded and giant-formed ruffian confronted him.

"That chap may be a friend o' yours, pard, but that don't scare me, for I'm the boss o' the Rocky Mountains, and the boys call me a terror; you might hev heerd o' me."

"I've heard of a good many hard characters from the Rockies, but I think you could rake the pile," was the calm, almost indifferent reply.

Instantly the bully's face grew white with rage, while he shouted:

"Ef you hain't heerd of Red Reid, it's time you did, an' yer shall feel o' him, too, for I takes up this yer quarrel, as I told the boy I

would see him through his trouble, and ef yonder fancy rooster didn't fight him, he'd hev ter tackle me; so as you has tuk his part, why we'll git up a leetle fun between us fer the boys, for I'm a biter, I am, from the Rockies."

The huge bully glanced around as if for admiration, and all present feeling now that trouble was sure to come, began to give the two men space, excepting Lord Varian, who maintained his stand by the side of the Scout.

"Yes, I'm a biter, I am," yelled the desperado again.

"Then be careful, for you might bite off more than you can chew," was the calm retort; but in spite of his seeming indifference all knew that Buffalo Bill meant instantaneous "business" if crowded, and was the quickest man "on the draw" along the border, and by far the best shot.

"Pard, throw me out a pint o' pizen, raal tanglefoot," yelled the desperado, and the bar-keeper brought the liquor, and it was dashed off at a few swallows.

"Gentlemen, will you join my friend and self in a drink before we go?" and Buffalo Bill glanced over the crowd pleasantly, and moved toward the bar.

But the bully immediately confronted him, and said, threateningly:

"Ef yer takes yer drink, pard, yer has ter walk o' me."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when an iron hand was upon his throat, and the next instant, by a display of his almost superhuman strength, Buffalo Bill had hurled the bully into the furthest corner of the saloon.

"Stand aside all!"

It was a command in the Scout's ringing voice, and in an instant, like a mad tiger, the huge desperado arose and rushed upon his enemy, his broad knife in one hand and a revolver in the other.

There were wild cries, rushing of feet, overturning of chairs and tables, and then two rapid shots, a loud yell and a heavy fall.

A moment after the smoke and dust drifted away, and the calm tones of Buffalo Bill again said:

"Now, gentlemen, we will have our drink."

Upon the floor, a bullet through his brain, lay Red Reid, the Terror of the Rocky Mountains.

With the perfect sang froid so characteristic of bordermen, the whole party stepped up to the bar and dashed off their drinks, and as Buffalo Bill turned to go he said to the barkeeper:

"Dick, have that fellow buried and I'll pay the cost."

"I'll do it, Bill, and he'll be a starter for the new parson to try his prayers on," answered the drink-dispenser, rather delighted at the popularity given to his saloon by the affair which had just taken place.

"But where is the boy?" asked Buffalo Bill, as, with Lord Varian, he moved toward the door.

"Thet youngster jist lit out, when you comed in, Bill—'kase why, I do not know," answered one of the crowd.

"It is just as well; come, my lord," and so saying the two friends left the saloon together, the Englishman thoroughly convinced that America was a strange country and produced stranger men, after the startling scene he had just witnessed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FATAL LOCKET.

UPON arriving near his cabin, Buffalo Bill rode away to look after the comfort of his horse, leaving Lord Varian to enter alone.

But hardly had the Scout dismounted when he heard the sharp crack of a pistol, and then a stifled cry as if for help.

Quickly he rushed toward the cabin, from whence the sounds came, and suddenly came upon two men struggling together, or rather one was holding the other firmly in his strong arms.

"Ah, Cody, I've caught the youngster; help me to secure him."

It was Lord Varian who spoke, and the "youngster" referred to was the boy who had sought to fight a duel with the nobleman in the saloon.

Grasping the youth in his powerful arms, Buffalo Bill raised him up bodily, and while Lord Varian opened the door, he bore him into the cabin where a light was burning.

"Oh, let me go! please let me go!" pleaded the boy, earnestly, and, touched by his appeal, Lord Varian said:

"He stepped out from the shadow of the cabin, and calling to me to draw and defend myself, fired, the bullet being turned by a military decoration I wear: being unable to get my pistol out of my holster I sprung upon him and secured him; but let him go now."

"No, I will first know who and what he is," said the Scout, firmly, and, unmindful of the pleading of the youth, he dragged him to the light.

One glance into that white face, and he cried:

"Wild Nell, by all that's holy!"

The nobleman at once sprung forward and glanced at the disguised woman, from whose

tip the mustache had fallen in the struggle, and the sombrero having dropped on the floor her hair was seen bound up in a knot on her head.

As if overwhelmed with emotion she sunk into a chair and hid her face in her hands, while she burst into tears.

For a few moments the two men stood silently regarding her, and then, in kindly tones, Lord Varian asked:

"How have I injured you that you should seek my life?"

Drying her tears she looked him straight in the face, and answered firmly:

"You came to my cabin to ask me if aught had been heard of Buffalo Bill, and you saw upon my neck this locket," and she drew from her bosom a star and crescent of diamonds, with the reverse side arranged for a miniature.

"True, I recognized the locket, and it was but natural that I should ask regarding it."

"I declined to tell you, and you said that I wore that which had been won by foul murder, and I gave you the lie direct."

"True, and your sex prevented your punishment for the insult," was the cool reply of the Englishman.

"So I knew, and, angered by your words, I disguised myself as a man and sought you out at the saloon, which I had seen you enter."

"Thank God that I was not drawn into any trouble with you; but your refusal to answer my questions regarding this locket, caused me, naturally, to think you knew from whence it came."

"I do know, and I will tell you, only it turned my heart to bitterness to be thought a thief," said the girl, passionately.

"Pardon me, I meant not to offend you, and I will explain my interest in the matter, for I came to this country to find whether it was true that my brother had been cruelly murdered by savages, and if so, to bear his remains back to England, for burial, after having, if possible, brought to punishment his murderers."

"When my brother came to America he wore that locket you now have on, and suspended by the same chain around his neck."

Wild Nell's face now turned to a deadly hue, and, almost in a whisper, she asked:

"Can there not be some mistake? Can it not have been one like this?"

"There is no mistake, for at a glance, as I saw it upon your neck the other day, I now see marks which could not have been by accident placed in one of similar workmanship."

"And those marks are?" asked the girl, anxiously, while Buffalo Bill moved forward with increased interest.

"First, the crescent is the crest of our house in England, and the star, of another noble family, and the *opal* has been the luck-stone of the Elphistones for generations; you see it in the center of the diamond crescent, while the *emerald* is the luck-stone of the family whose crest the star represents, and you observe it in the center, there."

He put his hand forward as though to touch the costly trinket, but with a startled cry Wild Nell shrank away from him, saying:

"No, no, no! do not take it."

"At least allow me to look at it; 'tis not its value I prize it for, and you shall have its equivalent."

The woman drew herself proudly up, and replied:

"Nor do I prize it for its intrinsic value, sir, but for the one who gave it to me."

"I will restore it to you, if you will allow me to look at it more closely."

"Never!"

"Why, Nell, what ails you?" asked Buffalo Bill, in surprise at her strange manner; but unnoticing her behavior, Lord Varian continued:

"There is a miniature likeness of a lady on the reverse side."

"There is not," was the emphatic rejoinder.

The nobleman looked puzzled, and said, thoughtfully:

"Can I be mistaken in the identity of the locket?"

"You certainly are."

"And there is no miniature on the reverse side?"

"Yes, there is, but not of a woman."

"Ah," and Lord Varian looked toward Buffalo Bill who had given vent to the exclamation.

"And the likeness is an oval one?"

"Yes."

"Around the rim it is studded with small opals?"

"Yes," replied Wild Nell, yet it was with evident reluctance.

"And a man's likeness is in the locket, now?" suddenly asked Buffalo Bill, with apparent indifference, and the woman's answer came promptly:

"Yes."

But then, as if feeling that she had perhaps committed herself too far, she continued:

"I will not tell you whose likeness is in the locket; it was given me by one I hold most dear, and for his sake I wore it."

"His sake," muttered the scout, and there was something in the tone that caused the pallor of the woman to increase.

"How long have you had it, may I ask?" urged Lord Varian.

"That I decline to answer, also," was the almost defiant reply.

"Nell," and the Scout stepped toward her; "do not think that either Lord Varian or myself believe that you know aught why you should not possess that locket; we think you innocent in the case, and to prove it, will not make our discovery of it public, so as to force the truth; but we are anxious to know one thing, and that is—who gave it to you?"

"Bill, there is no power on earth that will make me tell."

"So be it; let us drop the subject and I will see you in safety to your cabin, but I warn you not to attempt the life of Lord Varian again or we will quarrel."

"That is past, for I now know how he felt regarding the locket and do not blame him; good-evening, my lord, and do not let us be enemies."

She held out her hand and Lord Varian took it coldly and bowed.

The next moment she left the cabin with Buffalo Bill, and wended her way in the direction of her own lonely home, a quarter of a mile distant.

CHAPTER X.

A STARTLING TABLEAU.

DURING the walk to the cabin of Wild Nell neither Buffalo Bill nor the maiden spoke a word, for they seemed wholly engrossed with their own thoughts.

At length the home of the strange woman was reached, and as she put her hand on the door she turned and said, in a low tone:

"It was kind of you to see me home, Bill; good-night."

She held forth her hand, but the Scout, instead of taking it, said, firmly:

"I am coming in, Wild Nell; I wish to have a talk with you."

The woman bit her lips as if vexed, but silently placed the key in the lock and threw the door open.

It was a double cabin, that is, contained but two rooms, both of fair size, and back of the house was a small stable in which were three horses, all known to be splendid animals, and which Wild Nell cared for herself.

The room by which they entered did service as sitting and bedroom, and the adjoining one was where she cooked and ate her meals, for Wild Nell did all of her own work.

Around the walls of the sitting-room were hung a number of paintings and pencil sketches, the work of the fair occupant.

A guitar lay upon a sofa near by; a rack with books occupied one corner; and upon the bed were thrown a number of well-dressed skins of the wild-cat, panther and antelope skillfully worked, while mats of buffalo and wolf-skins covered the floor.

Several rifles of various patterns, and richly mounted with silver, were in racks on the walls, and knives and pistols, bows and arrows, Indian tomahawks and coup-sticks were scattered here and there, with saddles for both sexes, fancy bridles, lariats and male and feminine clothing completed the assortment and furnishing of the room.

It was the first time Buffalo Bill had ever been in the cabin, and he looked around him curiously, while he smilingly remarked:

"You have a perfect curiosity-shop here, Nell."

"Yet nothing that is not useful; be seated, please."

The Scout threw himself upon the sofa, and Wild Nell, taking a seat near him, said, simply:

"Well?"

"Nell, you are a curiosity yourself; a perfect wonder, and I do not know what to make of you," said the Scout, as if at a loss to know how to begin his conversation.

"I am a wretched, sinful woman, Bill," was the bitter reply.

"You should not be, for you have strange beauty; you are educated and refined in your tastes, and can adorn any society—"

"But the border suits me best, as you might add I am the best shot, the best rider, and the wildest she-devil on the plains."

The woman spoke with great bitterness, and the Scout hastily added:

"Those are accomplishments highly prized here, Nell."

"In a man, yes, but not in a woman, Bill; yet I am what I am, and a cruel fate still dogs my steps, driving me recklessly on to ruin."

"Do not speak thus, Wild Nell, for never have I heard one whisper against your character."

"Why do you not say since I killed that man who slandered me one year ago, shortly after I came here. Men only slander the weak and defenseless, Bill, and those who do are cowards; brave men never speak against women, be they what they may, for they have compassion with courage, and few know the damning temptations, and the miseries that often beset women to drag them down to a life of crime; none know what I have suffered, to become what I am."

"You lead a strange life, Nell, and I cannot account for it; why you should give up friends and society in civilization to come here and become a perfect Western Amazon I cannot understand."

The woman smiled grimly, and remained silent, and after awhile Buffalo Bill asked:

"Pardon me, Nell, but what is Royal Keene to you?"

In an instant Wild Nell was upon her feet, her eyes blazing as they turned upon the Scout, who remained seated and regarding her calmly.

"What is Royal Keene to me? Ha! ha! ha!"

The voice was hoarse with passion subdued, and the laugh was forced, and the Scout knew it.

"Yes, a few days ago out on the prairie, you saved my life by leveling your pistol at the heart of Royal Keene, ay, and even dared old Red Heart in the midst of his warriors; but when that man commanded you to desist, like a child, obedient to a parent, you obeyed; how, may I ask, did he gain that influence over a woman of such dare-devil pluck and independence as you are?"

"Buffalo Bill, you have crossed the threshold of a life that you shall not see beyond: I admire you greatly, I respect you, and I would risk my life to save you from harm, but never question me again on that subject."

"My past is as though it were in the grave; I live only for the future and revenge!"

She hissed out the last word through her ever-teeth, and her whole form trembled with emotion.

"Revenge upon whom?" persisted the Scout, as if to lead her on.

"Upon Royal Keene!"

The name burst from her lips in spite of herself, and it left Buffalo Bill again in a puzzled maze, and he glanced absently around the room, when his eyes fell upon a portrait.

It was the portrait of a woman, and the frame was skillfully made of black crêpe; the face was that of a matron of thirty-five, and very beautiful, while in every feature was a look that was familiar to the Scout, yet he could not tell when and where he had ever met the original.

He arose and regarded the portrait attentively, and in vain tried to fathom who it represented, and failing, he asked:

"Who is this, Wild Nell?"

"My mother."

It was all she said, and there was that in her tone which caused the Scout to ask her no more, and, thinking he had no right to question her further, he said, pleasantly:

"Well, Nell, you can always trust me as your friend, and if I can serve you, call upon me; but ere I go please answer me one question."

"I will if I can," and the maiden stepped in front of the Scout.

"Where is Royal Keene now?"

"He is here to answer for himself!"

With a loud cry Wild Nell turned to behold in the half-open doorway the tall form and hand, some face of Royal Keene, the Death Shot, and, as he held his revolver in his hand, she sprung forward and threw herself upon the broad breast of Buffalo Bill, just as he had quickly dragged his own trusty weapon from his belt.

Thus the three stood an instant, forming a terrible tableau.

CHAPTER XI.

A WOMAN'S POWER.

FACE to face, and with deadly hatred gleaming in the eyes of both, Buffalo Bill and Royal Keene stood, with Wild Nell sheltering the Scout from the one who she knew would take his life, with absolute pleasure in the cruel act.

An instant the position of the three remained unchanged in that terrible tableau, and then Buffalo Bill said, sternly:

"If you desire that it shall be a fight to the death between us, sir, I am at your service if you will leave this cabin."

"No, I hold the advantage, and you are too dangerous a man to let up with, so I'll dictate terms."

"No, no, there shall be no fight between you two; leave this cabin, I command you, Royal Keene!" cried Wild Nell, her eyes flashing fire, and her face determined.

"Nell, don't be a fool; it is for me to command, not you," said Royal Keene, quietly.

"It is for you to obey, and you shall!" was the defiant reply.

"Oh, ho! you then are taking the reins in your own hands?"

"Yes, and I shall hold them for this once, for you two men shall not fight here."

"There will be no trouble if Mr. Cody will pledge himself to do as I dictate," was the rejoinder of Royal Keene, who never once took his eyes off of the Scout, or lowered his threatening revolver.

"I follow the dictation of no man, sir, and though, as you say, you have the drop on me, if Wild Nell will step one side I'll settle this matter now and here," was the calm, fearless retort of Buffalo Bill.

"Ha! ha! you forget the name I bear, and that my bullet would pierce your brain ere you could level your revolver. No, I will offer you terms, and if you accept them there need be no trouble between us."

"But I wish trouble between us; you made a false accusation against me the other day, and sought to have me put out of the way, and I have determined that it shall be your life or mine."

"You fired at me a few days since at the mining cabin, and it will be my time next, and if I cannot track you to the gallows I am very much mistaken."

"Hold! Buffalo Bill, tell me, was the miner, old Buck, alive and conscious when you saw him in the cabin at the cavern?"

"He was."

"Did he make any confession to you before he died?" and as Royal Keene asked the question he seemed to be much excited.

"He did."

Royal Keene gazed an instant in silence at the fearless man before him and then said:

"It was my intention to offer you your life, if you would swear to leave this border never to return; but now, after what you have just said, I will kill you."

The face of Buffalo Bill never changed, although he saw deadly intent to keep his word in the eyes of the man before him; but Wild Nell tried to shelter the Scout still more with her slender form.

But every muscle of the Scout was ready, and every nerve on the alert, and should Royal Keene for once miss his aim and belie his name as Death Shot, a terrible struggle must follow.

"Buffalo Bill, you have just one minute to live."

The voice was as calm as though making an ordinary remark, and the face merciless, as Royal Keene stood with finger on trigger.

The Scout's hand was on the butt of his revolver, and every movement of his enemy was watched with painful interest, for all hung upon that first shot.

As for Wild Nell, she was livid with excitement, yet calm, and held herself firmly between that threatening muzzle and the Scout.

"Coward! Meet him like a man; if you will, I'll give the word to fire," cried the girl.

"No, I know what he is, and I have too much at stake to risk a combat with him on equal terms; he shall die within thirty seconds."

"The Death Shot speaks with a crooked tongue."

All started, and in spite of his nerve, Royal Keene turned half round as the strange voice sounded behind him.

And that one movement, slight as it was, changed the position of affairs, for Buffalo Bill's revolver fairly leaped from its belt, and in the flash of a thought, covered the heart of Royal Keene, and the two men now stood on equal terms, their weapons leveled, and their fingers resting on the trigger.

Why they did not fire, neither knew, but each watched the finger of the other, the one that rested upon the trigger, and the slightest tremor and both weapons would have been discharged.

So intently were they watching each other, the Death Shot aiming at the head of Buffalo Bill, over Wild Nell, and the Scout at the heart of his foe, that they looked neither to the right nor left as a step was heard on the cabin floor, and a form glided into the room.

"The Death Shot's tongue speaks crooked; the great buffalo-killer shall not die."

The speaker aimed an arrow straight at the heart of Royal Keene, and the bow was drawn back with a force that would send the keen shaft through the man's body, did the bronzed fingers let slip their hold.

And the one who thus threatened Royal Keene was a young girl of scarcely seventeen, and an Indian.

She was graceful in form, and was possessed of a beauty seldom found in the Indian race, for her features were regular, her teeth pearly white, and her eyes large and as bright as diamonds.

That she was the daughter of a chief her attire indicated, for she was dressed in the finest of buckskin, beautifully beaded, and her arms and neck were covered with gold and silver ornaments.

Some time before Buffalo Bill had rescued that maiden from the Sioux, who held her as a captive, and from that day she had devotedly loved the pale-face Scout, but kept her regard from every eye, as, Indian girl though she was, she would not let others see that she had given her heart to one who she knew cared not for her; but secretly she was wont to send the Scout presents of beautifully-worked moccasins, leggings of the best skins, and many other little things that she knew would be acceptable.

She had just come from depositing a bundle of these little gifts upon the steps of the Scout's cabin, and was stealing secretly away to return to her prairie home, when, through the open door of Wild Nell's home, she beheld the thrilling scene, and that Buffalo Bill was in deadly danger.

Instantly she sprung from the beautiful spotted pony she was riding, and gliding up to the cabin, fixed an arrow to the bow and stepped within.

Had she not come as she did, those two men would have met in combat, and one, perhaps

both, would have fallen, for it would have proven a battle of giants.

The moment Wild Nell saw that Star Eye held an arrow covering the heart of Royal Keene, with the strange contradiction of her nature, she sprung from the side of Buffalo Bill, and placed herself between the Death Shot and his threatened danger.

But though this left no obstacle between Buffalo Bill and himself, Royal Keene was too cunning to bring matters to a crisis by firing, as he knew that, though he killed the Scout, he would fall himself at the hands of the Indian girl.

"Why turns the Star Eye her arrow upon me?" he asked, though he did not look toward her, or take his eyes from off the Scout.

"The Death Shot is a snake in the grass; he would strike at the great hunter, but the Star Eye will kill him if he strikes. The prairies are large; let him go."

The words of Star Eye, delivered in a quiet way, and in good English, admitted of but one interpretation: the Death Shot must go.

"Shall I turn my back and be shot like a wolf by that man?" he said, angrily.

"No, I am not like yourself an assassin. You are free to go, but beware when we again meet."

"Could I kill you now, I would not do so in the presence of that noble woman whose love for you I respect. Take the Star Eye's advice and go!"

Buffalo Bill spoke in the almost indifferent manner habitual to him when in danger, and with perfect confidence in his word, Royal Keene lowered his weapon and said, threateningly:

"Yes, I will go; but, Buffalo Bill, beware!"

Without another word, or even a glance at the lovely woman who had shielded him with her form from the threatening arrow of the Star Eye, Royal Keene turned and bounded out of the door.

Quickly Wild Nell glided after him, and disappeared in the darkness without.

"The Star Eye has more than returned the service I rendered her many moons ago, and the buffalo-killer thanks her," said Buffalo Bill, kindly, taking the hand of the Indian girl, who now trembled visibly.

"The pale-face hunter is a mighty chief, and his words are sweet to the heart of the Star Eye; but she must go back to her people," she said, softly.

"Why is the Star Eye here, when her people are far off on the prairie?"

The Indian girl's head dropped at the question, and without a word she turned away and went out of the door.

Believing he had offended her, Buffalo Bill followed, and, as he stood in the light of the doorway there came a flash and he fell his full length upon the floor, and lay like one shot to death.

CHAPTER XII.

STAR EYE ON THE TRAIL.

THE shot that had brought down Buffalo Bill, when in the bright doorway, like a picture in a frame, was fired from a spot half a hundred paces distant, and from a clump of timber directly in front of the cabin.

Following the shot was a woman's scream, and then the rapid clatter of hoofs.

The one who had fired was Royal Keene.

He had mounted his horse, which he had left in the timber, when he came to the cabin, and there Wild Nell had joined him. At first he cursed the poor woman bitterly for following him, and preventing his killing the Scout when he arrived on the scene, and held him at an advantage; but her reply in a low tone, caused him to say:

"All right; another time we will meet."

Just then the Scout appeared in the doorway, and quick as the flash of lightning Royal Keene threw his rifle forward and pulled the trigger.

The report and fall of Buffalo Bill instantly followed, and from the lips of Wild Nell broke a wild shriek, while, with a harsh laugh the Death Shot put spurs to his horse and dashed away.

Seeing that he had gone Wild Nell started at a run for her cabin, and ere she reached it she beheld the form of the Indian girl bound into the door, bend over the prostrate Scout, and then, without a word, spring away from the cabin.

A shrill call followed, and the spotted pony darted from around the cabin, and Star Eye was upon his back, and away he flew, evidently in pursuit of Royal Keene.

"She is after him and will kill him," cried Wild Nell, in sudden terror, and drawing from her belt—for she was still in man's attire, the reader will remember—a revolver, she threw it forward and rapidly sent shot after shot after the flying Indian girl.

But Star Eye did not even turn in her saddle, and kept straight on, flying through the darkness, unhurt, as was also her swift pony, by the leaden messengers that whistled over her head.

Though Royal Keene was mounted upon an animal that hardly had an equal, and certainly

no superior on the plains, the spotted pony followed on his trail with a speed that was marvelous, for Star Eye's confidence in the "going and staying" qualities of the animal she rode, alone caused her to trust herself upon the prairies so far from the village of her people.

Just keeping the dark flying form of Royal Keene in sight, as he sped on through the darkness, Star Eye held her pace so as not to lose him for an instant.

That she was following him to avenge Buffalo Bill was evident, and that she dare not let him see her on his trail she well knew, for she felt she was no match for the man she was after, unless she could take him at a disadvantage.

And at a disadvantage she determined to take him, relying upon her Indian cunning and natural woman's wit sufficient to, in some way, get the best of him.

Thus the two flew along over the prairie, the man evidently determined upon some decided course, and holding to it, at the same time confident that he had killed his dangerous enemy, the Scout, while the Indian girl on his trail as determinedly held her intention of avenging herself upon the one who, as she also believed, had killed Buffalo Bill, whom she loved better than any one else in the world, and with all the intensity of her savage nature.

At length as the gray of dawn began to light on the eastern horizon, Royal Keene drew rein and halted, for a short rest, in a motte where there was both water and grass.

His faithful horse was soon lariated out to feed, and the Death Shot threw himself down to rest for a short time.

From a rise in the prairie, a long way off, Star Eye beheld her enemy halt, and she at once determined to in some way get near to him, though it was a difficult task, as Royal Keene was a thorough plainsman and slept, so to speak, with one eye open.

Observing that the prairie was irregular, she concluded to lariat her pony out, and then crawl toward the distant motte as best she could.

Carefully selecting the course she would follow, she took from her head the gaudy coronet of feathers, and laying flat down, cautiously crawled over this hill.

It was a difficult task to accomplish; but Star Eye was set upon revenge, and, worming herself along, she slowly drew toward the timber, though she made hardly a hundred yards in an hour's time.

At length she reached a small wash and by following this she got along more rapidly, and three hours after leaving the hill, she lay panting and revengeful, within a dozen paces of the man she had determined to kill.

Nearer and nearer she drew, noiseless as a serpent, and with her eyes blazing, and then she halted and dropped her hand upon the long knife she wore in her belt.

Had she been a moment sooner Royal Keene's life would have ended then and there, for the sharp blade would have been driven into his heart.

But for some reason, perhaps because the presence of danger awakened him, he uttered a startled cry, like one in a nightmare, and sprang to his feet.

Maddened with rage at her failure to take him unawares, utterly fearless of consequences, and determined to match her strength with the strong man before her, Star Eye rushed upon him with a cry of fury, her knife in hand.

Royal Keene saw his danger and had just time to catch the uplifted hand in his own iron grasp, and raising the slender form in his powerful arms he hurled it to the earth with a force that rendered the poor girl unconscious.

Then drawing his pistol from his belt, he seemed as if about to fire upon her and forever end her life; but the manhood in him appealed to him, and with a flush of shame upon his dark face, he put the weapon back and turned away.

Five minutes after he was mounted upon his horse and again dashing over the prairie at a rapid rate, leaving poor Star Eye, still insensible, lying upon the ground beneath the shelter of the cottonwood trees.

Shortly after Royal Keene disappeared in the distance, Star Eye slowly recovered consciousness, and soon the dark eyes opened and looked around her searching, and an expression of pain passed over the face as she moved.

But stifling a cry of suffering she arose to her feet and sought the bank of a little stream that flowed near, and began to bathe her bruises.

Feeling refreshed and better after a bath and rest, she returned slowly to where she had left her pony, and was soon upon his back and once more upon the trail of Royal Keene.

Though she seemed to suffer intensely, she was not one to give up her purpose, and though she could not ride rapidly she yet kept persistently on, resting when absolutely compelled to, and with the settled look upon every feature to revenge herself yet upon Royal Keene.

It was a long and a weary trail she followed, and when at last she could go no further she sunk down to rest in some timber upon the banks of a small stream, and there, a few hours after, two white hunters found her lying upon the soft grass and raving in delirium.

"It are the Star Eye o' the Pawnees: old Red

Heart's darter," said one of the hunters, an old weatherbeaten frontiersman who had been an Indian-fighter and trapper for forty years, and who was known on the border as Beaver Ben.

"You're right, Ben; and she's in a bad way; just listen how she lets slip the chin music; but we must take care of her, for her people are friendly to the whites; and besides, it wouldn't be right to let her die here," answered the companion of Beaver Ben, who was a much younger man than the other, and one of the best plainsmen in the country.

His name was Jack Nelson, but the red-skins called him *Cha-sha-sha-na-po-ge-o*, which being interpreted means, "Fill the pipe with red willow."

A perfect type of a borderman, well-formed, good-looking, as strong as a lion and as fearless, Jack Nelson roamed the plains from a real love of the dangers he encountered, and was more at home in an Indian camp than in the cabins of the settlers.

Springing from their horses the two men at once made arrangements to camp, and raising the form of the Indian girl they placed their blankets down for a bed, and did all they could for her.

"What's that she's a-sayin', Jack?" asked Beaver Ben, as Star Eye continued to chatter with delirium.

"She's talking about Buffalo Bill, or I am a parson; hear her now how she runs on; and about Royal Keene, too, for she calls him the Death Shot; what can it mean, Ben?"

"Do' know; I wonder ef that Death Shot hed anything ter do with this gal's ailin'; you know when we met him at the station he said as how he'd jist come along this trail."

"Yes, Ben; and I don't like him for a cent; did you hear that?"

Both were silent and listened attentively to the ravings of the young girl, who said in a disconnected way in her own language, which both the hunters understood well:

"The Death Shot must die; the Star Eye of the Pawnees must let her knife drink his blood; the great buffalo-killer of the pale-faces cries from the happy hunting-grounds of his people, for the Star Eye to kill the Death Shot; she has obeyed the spirit of the buffalo-killer, but the Death Shot's trail is long, and she is weary and in pain from the blow he gave her."

She ceased speaking, and Jack Nelson quickly said

"I tell you, Ben, there's been some dirty work played, I'm thinking, and taking all things together, it looks bad for that Royal."

"Yas, he was durned anxious like to git to ther train, as he said he was goin' East for a spell; and the gal speaks as though Buffalo Bill was dead, and that Keene feller had done the business for him."

"It certainly looks bad, and I'll tell you what I'll do."

"I are a-hearin' o' yer."

"Well, I will strike for the Pawnee village of Red Heart, and tell him about his daughter, while you stay here to nurse her until her people come; then I will go to McPherson and look up Buffalo Bill, and see what's been to pay."

"I'm willin', Jack, and I'll do the best I kin fer the poor leetle gal; only git out quick, kase I hain't a doctor man, yer know," was the reply of old Beaver Ben.

"I'll hurry along, and when Red Heart comes you strike for McPherson, for I'll wait there for you."

So saying, Jack Nelson mounted his wiry little pony and set off at a canter across the prairie, heading in the direction in which he knew the village of Red Heart then was hunting buffalo.

CHAPTER XIII.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

HARDLY had the spotted steed disappeared in the darkness, following fast upon the trail of Royal Keene, than Buffalo Bill staggered to his feet from the cabin floor, the blood trickling from a slight scalp wound in his head, where the cruel bullet had glanced along.

Momentarily stunned by the shock, it was an instant before the Scout could collect his scattered senses, and when he glanced around he saw Wild Nell entering the cabin door.

Not knowing but that Royal Keene was following her, he quickly drew a revolver and stood on the defensive; but, stepping within, Wild Nell closed the door behind her, while she said, anxiously:

"Are you much hurt?"

"No; the bullet merely cut the scalp, but the blow stunned me; the shot was fired by Royal Keene?"

"Yes, when you came in the light of the door; I could not prevent it."

"It is just as well, for it gives me another account to settle with him when we meet."

"Do not kill him; spare him for my sake," said the girl, almost plaintively.

"Why should I? Has he not attempted my life, and how have I harmed him?"

"True; but though I hate him I do not wish to see him die."

"Wild Nell, you are a strange creature; why did you fire at him as he rode away, for I think I heard pistol-shots?"

"You did, and I fired them, but not at Royal Keene."

"At whom, then?"

"The Indian girl."

"Ha! and have you injured her?" and Buffalo Bill's eyes flashed angrily.

"No, for I did not check her speed; she went in pursuit of Royal Keene, and I fired at her, though, had I thought an instant, I might have known her pony could never keep pace with the horse he rides."

Buffalo Bill was silent a moment, and then said:

"It would be useless to follow them now, for I could not find their trail; but at daylight I shall do so."

Without another word Buffalo Bill strode toward the door, and without a word Wild Nell let him go out into the darkness.

Then, as the door closed behind him, she threw herself upon her bed and burst into tears.

Swiftly back to his cabin walked the Scout, and arriving there found Lord Varian pacing the floor in deep thought and awaiting him.

"I heard firing, Cody; do you know anything about it?"

"Yes, my lord," and Buffalo Bill made known to Lord Varian all that had taken place.

When he spoke of Star Eye the Englishman said:

"It must have been the same girl that I saw; I went out to put up your horse, and as I came back saw an Indian girl glide away from the door, and yonder bundle was upon the step."

Buffalo Bill stepped forward and unrolled a bundle of dressed buckskin, which was wrapped around a pair of moccasins, a hunting-shirt and leggings and an ingeniously made belt.

"This solves the mystery; now I know from whence come my presents of this kind," said the Scout, thoughtfully, as he laid the things aside, and added, in a low tone:

"I hope harm will not befall little Star Eye for following Royal Keene, yet I fear for her, as he would not hesitate to kill her, I verily believe."

Unable to sleep the Scout paced the floor, after dressing the slight wound on his head, and when daylight approached both himself and Lord Varian ate a hasty breakfast, and mounting their horses set forth on the trail of Royal Keene and the Star Eye.

The tracks were easily found and then the two started forward at a canter, and continued on for half a mile when Buffalo Bill suddenly drew rein.

"Early as it is, there is some one on the trail ahead of us," he said, as he gazed searchingly upon the ground.

"And who can it be?" asked Lord Varian.

"That remarkable girl, Wild Nell; I know the tracks of her horses well, and she is riding rapidly. Come, we must push on, for Star Eye is in double danger, as I believe Wild Nell would kill her to protect that wretch from harm."

"What an enigma she is!—one moment wishing to kill him, and the next risking her life to save him," said Lord Varian.

"Yes, and what he is to her I cannot tell," and the two men pressed on more rapidly.

But Royal Keene and his pursuer had had fully five hours' start of them, and had ridden on a run, so were a long way ahead; yet, pressing steadily on, the trailers came to the spot where the Indian maiden had lariated her pony, while she crept toward the timber where the Death Shot had halted to rest.

The prairie-craft of Buffalo Bill at once gave him an insight into the truth of the matter, and explaining it to Lord Varian they rode hastily on toward the motte.

"The girl came back after her pony, for there is his track," said the Scout, and soon after the two men stood on the spot which had so nearly proven fatal to Royal Keene.

There, too, the prairie knowledge of Buffalo Bill, who carefully examined the surroundings, gave an idea of what had occurred, and they once more started on the trail, halting only when night came on.

A long night's rest and the Scout and the Englishman again started on the trail, and steadily they pursued it, until far in the distance they suddenly discovered an Indian camp.

Approaching nearer Buffalo Bill pronounced the Indians to be the band of Red Heart, and they urged their horses forward at an increased pace.

But before they reached the village they discovered signs of considerable excitement, and in the mids of the red-skins the Scout recognized a pale-face, who, with the Indians, came forward to meet them.

It was Jack Nelson, who had arrived but a few moments before at the Indian camp, and called out, as he drew near to the new-comers:

"Bill, old pard, I'm glad to see you right side up with care, for I feared you had passed in your chips."

"No, Jack, I am still on hand; but what is the trouble?" answered the Scout.

"Well, old Beaver Ben and myself found the prettiest Indian gal in these parts lying sick and hurt some distance from here, and—"

"It was Star Eye, the daughter of Red Heart," interrupted the Scout.

"True as preaching, and she's in a bad way, for she's got fever, and chins about you being dead and that the Death Shot, whom you know is that Royal Keene, shall die by her hand."

"Poor girl; and where is she?"

"I left her at the Pawnee timber-motte—you know where that is—and Beaver Ben is looking after her, while I came on to tell old Red Heart, after which I was going over to the Post to look you up."

"I thank you, Jack; but did you see Royal Keene?"

"Yes; he's gone East."

"What?"

"He took train at the nearest railroad station for a trip East, for me and Ben seen him."

Buffalo Bill and Lord Varian exchanged looks, and the former said:

"Jack, you told old Red Heart about his daughter?"

"Yes, Bill, and the chief and boss medicine-man lit out at once for the Pawnee Motte, and the village will follow."

"Well, there is nothing to be done for the girl, as the Pawnee medicine-man will look after her, so I will ask you to guide Lord Varian back to the Post."

"And you, Cody?" asked the Englishman.

"I will follow on the trail of Royal Keene, if he leads me to the Atlantic," said the Scout, firmly.

"You are convinced, then, that he is the one who murdered my brother?" asked Lord Varian, in a low tone.

"There is certainly a network of suspicion around him, sir, and I happen to know that his trip East is one of deviltry, and I will circumvent him, and yet bring him to justice."

"I have perfect faith in you, Cody, and hence remain passive, believing that you will yet unearth the mystery that hangs over my brother's death, and then quick punishment upon the murderer shall follow; but, going East you will need funds, so permit me to—"

"Thanks, my lord, but I am amply provided with money, and yet there is one favor I would ask of you?"

"Name it, and it is granted beforehand, if in my power."

Buffalo Bill glanced at Jack Nelson, and leaning forward whispered something to Lord Varian, who answered, quickly:

"A good idea; do just as you please, and if you need me telegraph to the nearest station, and I will come on."

Buffalo Bill now told Jack Nelson to go with Lord Varian back to the Post, and to act as hunter and guide for the nobleman until his return from the East, and under no circumstances to speak of where he had gone.

A few words more and they separated, the Indian village having already moved away in the direction of Pawnee Motte, where poor Star Eye lay ill.

Under the guidance of Jack Nelson Lord Varian immediately turned back toward the Post, while Buffalo Bill continued on alone, heading due east, and intending to strike the railroad station at the point where Royal Keene had taken the train for the East.

Shortly after nightfall he halted at the foot of a thickly-wooded hill to camp for the night; but hardly had he removed the saddle from his horse when he saw a bright light upon the hill-side far above him.

For an instant only did it catch his eye, and then all was darkness again. Convinced that some danger was lurking near, he concealed his horse in a ravine near by, and cautiously began ascending the hill in the direction he had seen the light.

A climb of half a mile, and he came to a halt, for he distinctly heard a loud, hoarse laugh not a hundred feet from him.

With renewed caution he advanced, and soon saw a "dug-out" in the hillside, and from within were heard voices.

Recognizing by their language that they were white men, and anticipating no danger from them, he advanced boldly and knocked upon the rude door.

Instantly a rapid moving of feet was heard within, and then a voice asked:

"Who is there?"

"A friend who seeks shelter for the night," answered the Scout.

"Come in!" replied the same voice that had before spoken.

Pushing open the door he entered without hesitation, and as he glanced around him, to his surprise he discovered a dozen rough-looking men present, and each one held a revolver covering his heart.

Too late to retreat he knew that he had invaded a den of prairie renegades, and that he was at the mercy of men who held no mercy in their hearts.

* A hole in the ground, covered with poles, grass and sod, with a fireplace in one end.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NIGHTHAWKS.

THOUGH recognizing at a glance that he was in a trap, and that every man he saw before him was an enemy, Buffalo Bill showed not the slightest sign of fear, but said with a smile:

"This is a strange way to receive a friend, pards."

Each glanced at the other, and then the leader answered:

"We don't know who is friends, nowadays, and has to look upon all comers as enemies; but tell me, how many is with you?"

"My horse and myself are all; I was on my way to the settlements, started to camp at the foot of the hill, and seeing your light came on here," said the Scout, quietly.

"That was when you opened that door, Jim Haskins; I tell yer, light kin be seen a long way off, and we must be keerful," said the leader, who now lowered his revolver, his comrades following suit.

Pretending to misunderstand the leader, Buffalo Bill replied:

"Yes, one has to be careful, for Pawnee-killer's band of Sioux are abroad now on the prairie."

"We don't keer a cuss for Pawnee-Killer and his Sioux, pard; it are our own kind we's afeerd of, as you well knows, for I is acquainted with who you be," and the man looked straight in the face of the Scout, who asked in a curious way:

"Why should white men be afraid of their own kind?"

"Have you ever heerd o' the Nighthawks, pard?"

"Yes; they are a gang of desperadoes and horse-thieves that are the curse of this border, raiding only in the dark, stealing and murdering, and never fighting unless cornered," was the fearless reply of Buffalo Bill.

"You has us down fine, pard."

"You! you are certainly joking," said the Scout, with well-affected surprise.

"I guesses not; we is the Nighthawks, of whom you has just spoke so good," was the leader's remark.

"Why, there's a reward of five hundred dollars on the head of each one of you."

"True as Gospil, pard, an' thar is thirteen o' us here, so you can figger up how much we'd bring ef yer was to take us all in, an' p'raps you'd better try."

This was said menacingly, and determined not to show that he feared them, Buffalo Bill said quickly:

"If I had three good men with me, I'd try it, anyhow; but what is your pleasure with me, for I'm not a fool to attempt to fight all of you?"

"Waal, how w'u'd yer like to jine ther band? Looks as ef thar was grit in yer."

"Thank you, I'm no thief."

"You has a sweet way o' putting it; but now tell us who you is?"

"That is none of your business."

"By jingo! but you has got grit; we'll see if it holds out."

"Pard, I knows who he is, and I has had cause to."

The speaker was standing in the background, but now he stepped forward, and Buffalo Bill recognized him as a man who had once been a soldier and had deserted after killing a sergeant, but whom he had captured and taken back to the fort, where he was sentenced to be shot, yet escaped death by making his escape a few hours before the time appointed for his execution.

Though he knew that the deserter had threatened to kill him for capturing him, Buffalo Bill was determined to have the thing out, and said:

"Hello! Dick Lightfoot, we meet again!"

"Yes, an' I guess it'll be our last meeting, Buffalo Bill."

"Buffalo Bill!"

The name was upon every lip in chorus, as the soldier spoke it, for though no one else present seemed to know the famous Scout by sight, one and all knew him well by reputation, and feared him more than any man on the border, as he had always proven himself the bitter foe of renegades and horse-thieves.

"Pard, that settles it; you hain't got long to tarry here on 'arth, and you'd better sling out a leetle Gospil-music," said the leader, while every revolver in the crowd again covered the broad breast of the Scout.

With a fearless smile upon his handsome face, Buffalo Bill stood, with folded arms, before the scowling Nighthawks, who just waited the signal of their leader to kill him in his tracks.

But that signal was not given, and the tableau was continued for a full minute, each one mentally acknowledging the splendid nerve of the man before them, who so indifferently looked into the threatening muzzles.

"Pard, you has game an' no mistake; but what is we ter do with yer?"

"You just intimated that you intended to kill me."

"I just inti—what?"

"Intimated."

"Yas, I s'pose I did, but I pass on big words;

they gives me ther toothache, so sling out small ones; now, what is we ter do with yer?"

"If you ask me the question, I answer, let me go."

"But I don't axe yer ther question; I only hates to see a man kilt as has got your grit, an' I says to my pards, what is we ter do with yer?"

"You remember our orders from the chief?" suggested the deserter, whom Buffalo Bill had called Dick Lightfoot.

"Yas, ther chief said as how we was ter kill Buff'ler Bill the moment we set eyes 'pon him; now, pard, won't yer jist make some leetle trouble, so as we can drap on yer?" and the man turned again to the Scout, who answered, promptly:

"As Dick Lightfoot seems to want me out of the way, I'll fight it out with him, and if I kill him, then let me go."

Several voices at once cried out in favor of this proposition, but the deserter did not seem to relish the anticipated meeting, and said, quickly:

"Yes, and then he'll go and bring the soldiers down upon the balance of you; no, I move that we kill him, and then we are safe."

"Them is words of wisdom, pard, and as the chief told us to kill him, it's got to be done," and the leader turned to Buffalo Bill and continued:

"Has you any favorite mode o' dying, pard?"

"Never having tried it, I cannot say that I have."

"Then we'll make it as pleasant for yer as we conveniently can; now, pard, jist hand me yer shootin'-irons."

As the man advanced toward Buffalo Bill he failed to notice the lightning glance the prisoner sent around him, and the manner in which he seemed to gather himself, like a tiger preparing to spring.

That the men would kill him, he knew that there was not the slightest doubt, and that his chances of escape were painfully few he also well understood.

But certain death would quickly follow if he surrendered his weapons, and there was a chance in his favor if he resisted.

With one lightning glance he took in the odds for and against him, and then said:

"Pards, I guess you won't be so cruel as to kill an unarmed man, so here are my pistols, if you want them."

He unbuckled his belt as he spoke and held it forth, while the leader and the deserter stepped briskly forward to take them.

But just as they stretched forth their hands to grasp the belt, it fell to the ground, and two revolvers were suddenly thrust forward and fired in half a second's time.

The reports of the pistols, yells, and a crashing sound came almost together, and then the Nighthawks were aware that two of their comrades lay dead on the floor of the "dug-out," that the door had been broken open by one powerful kick, and that Buffalo Bill had fled.

With wild cries they started in pursuit, not five seconds behind him, but from the light into darkness momentarily blinded their eyes, and not knowing which way he had gone, they fired at random as they ran.

In the meantime, Buffalo Bill fled with the speed of a deer down the steep hillside, well knowing that the desperadoes would rapidly follow him, and anxious to reach his horse before they came up.

After several rather severe falls, in the darkness being unable to see where he placed his feet, he reached the ravine where his horse was concealed, and quickly saddled and bridled him; but ere he could mount there came a flash and report, and a bullet whistled over his head, showing that his pursuers had followed him rapidly, and had discovered him.

"Hold on, pard!" yelled a hoarse voice, and another flash and report followed, but again the aim was untrue, and an answering shot from the Scout went straight to the mark, and the renegade uttered a loud cry and sprung backward a step or two to then fall dead, just as several of his comrades dashed up to the spot.

But Buffalo Bill was already in his saddle, and a word to his horse sent the noble animal away like an arrow from a bow, followed by a rattling volley of pistol shots.

"A close shave for life that; but it's war now between me and those Nighthawks," muttered the Scout, as he urged his horse on rapidly across the rolling prairies, congratulating himself over and over again upon his escape from certain death.

CHAPTER XV.

A BRACE OF VILLAINS.

FROM the wild haunts of the far frontier, where the adventurous settler, the reckless desperado, the fearless borderman, and the untamed red-skin are to be found in their glory, amid the prairies and mountains, to the marts of civilization, in the handsome city of St. Louis, I will now ask my reader to accompany me.

In a dingy room on a narrow street of St. Louis, sat a man, whose dark face, black eyes and hooked nose at once indicated that he was a Hebrew.

He was dressed in a suit of black broadcloth, almost clerical in its cut, and yet wore a large gold chain, to which hung a red seal, and upon his little finger glittered a diamond of great size and beauty.

Yet the surroundings were not such as to indicate that the rooms were those of a man of wealth, as a single bed, a wash-stand and table, several chairs and a trunk made up the furniture; yet, there dwelt Moses Moloch, the rich Jew bachelor of St. Louis, and a man whose wealth caused him to be sought after by many who even disliked him, and who had won the title of millionaire by taking advantage of the adversity of others.

On the street, in society, or dining at some fashionable hotel, Moses Moloch was under observation, and looked and lived well; but in his own room he felt that he was free from public gaze, and spent not a dollar more than necessary upon home comforts, for very few were ever invited across the threshold of the Jew's abiding place at night.

As he now sat in his easy-chair, his face wore a cunning leer, while he muttered to himself:

"Yes, dey vill all pelongs to me; t'e houses, t'e lants, and all dat he owns, and I vill get me mooch moneys, besides dat I get me mooch revenge dat he vas tam me when I ask his leetle girl to marry mit me; and she vas mat mit me, too, and tell me dat I vas forget my self; well, well, ve vill see who forgets deyself now—ah, dere is de shudge."

A knock at the door caused Moses Moloch to spring to his feet and approach it.

"Who ish dere?" he asked.

"Moses, I say, are you deaf?" answered a stentorian voice from without, followed by another pounding upon the door, which the Jew hastily opened, with an angry:

"No, I ish not deaf, shudge. Well, come in."

At this invitation there entered a stout little gentleman, whose important strut and pompous air gave one the idea of a bantam rooster putting on airs.

He was flashily-dressed, wore a swallow-tail coat, wide checked pants, a high stock and standing collar, and white gloves. Upon his head was a white high hat, and in his hand he carried a gold-headed cane.

Marching across the room he seated himself in the Jew's easy-chair, placed his hat upon the table, and leaning forward on his cane, carefully surveyed the furniture, while he burst forth with:

"I say, Moses, you don't put on style at home; there's where you are economical; but I must not complain, as this is the first time I have had the honor of being invited here. Well, what news?"

"Well, I ish got a letter from a frint o' mine, vat I wish to talk mit you about."

"Go ahead, my fine fellow, especially if there is money in it."

"Well, you knows dat I pays you when you ish work for me?"

"Yes, yes, and I do my work well; but what's up now?"

"I have me some leetle troubles, I will tell you about; you know dat Mish Louise Melville was refuse my hant and my heart?"

"So you hinted to me once; but it was merely on account of religious scruples, I assure you, for what other motive could she have had?"

The remark of the "Judge," for he only held that title by courtesy, seemed to please the Jew, who replied:

"Well, she is a Presbyterian and I ish a Hebrew, dat ish a fact; but, she wouldn't marry me, and her fader vas very mat dat I want her to, and dat make me mat, so I says to myself, 'Moses, you ish want to get vat you call even mit dat girl and her papa, and I have arranged to get all t'e moneys dat pelongs to them."

"A noble idea; and how will you do it, Moses?"

"Well, I bolts her papa's notes for all he is wort', and as she has monish of her own, I vant to get dat too, so I finds her a husband."

"As who, pray?"

"Mr. Marmaduke."

"Ah, that rich young gentleman now stoppin' at the hotel where I—I—"

"Where you ish take a drink when you get treated, shudge? Yes, dat ish t'e young mans what I mean."

"Well, surely she can have no objection to him, for he is as rich as a prince, they say."

"Yes, for t'irty days; how much you t'ink it takes a prince to live t'irty days, shudge?" asked the Jew, with a cunning leer.

"Well, let me see: say five thousand dollars, judging by what I live on."

"Five t'ousand tollars! Well, dat ish joost vat I gives t'e young man, and he is to marry t'e girl, and get her monish for me."

"Ah! a great thought, and one worthy of my stupendous brain, Moses. So this young Noel Marmaduke, who has St. Louis society by the ears, so to speak, is one of your tools?"

"Yes, he ish work for me. You know he is a good young man, and steal somet'ings in New York what I know all about, and I vas get him away from the penitentiary, and he do what I tell him, and marry the girl."

"Yes, yes; and you finger the wealth he gets by his marriage, or he goes back to prison?"

"Shudge, you ish see it all; now I wants you to go mit me this evening to the house of Mishter Melville, and I will tell him I must come down, that ish vat you call him, mit my notes for all he is wort, if he don't make t' girl marry my nice young man, Marmaduke."

"Yes, and the girl will consent to save her father."

"Dat ish so."

"But may she not pay off the mortgages, if she does not like this Marmaduke?"

"She ish not got t' monish yet; only when she ish eighteen years of age."

"Ah! and she is how old now?"

"It will be four mont's before she ish of age, shudge."

"You hold the trump card, Moses; now how can I give you my valuable services?"

"Vell, you ish draw up all t' legal papers vat I vant."

"So I can; but your friend you spoke of having a letter from?"

"Ah yes, shudge; he ish annudder nice young man; he kill somebody and he vas put in prison for to be tried for murder; but he kills t' jailer and gets away mit himself, and so he don't was pe hoong."

"Vell, he vas an olt frint of mine; I lend him monish many times, and he writes me word that he comes back now mit disguise to get some papers from his uncle; he wants me to buy an olt goold mine his uncle have got out West, and if he von't sell it, he vill get it anyhow."

"Another bold stroke wanted, I see; the mine has doubtless panned out rich."

"Yes, and t' yoong man ish t' nephew of Mishter Melville."

"I see, I see; and I recall the circumstance of the murder now, and it was whispered old Melville aided his nephew to escape, as he did not wish to have any one with his blood in their veins dancing in mid-air at the end of a rope. Well, the young man runs a risk in coming back, but he is a fearless fellow, I've heard."

"Yes, he ish very prave, shudge."

"There is a large reward offered for his apprehension, I believe, Moses," said Judge Shyster, thoughtfully.

"Dere ish five t'ousand tollars, shudge, but you ish petter not make t'at monish," replied the Jew, with an angry glitter in his eyes.

"Me! why, Moses, how can you be so unkind?" said Judge Shyster, with an injured tone.

"I remembers dat dere ish a man wanted for a leetle bank robbery, shudge, and I vill—"

"My dear, dear Moses, how can you? Now, pray don't refer to anything of a disagreeable nature, for all should be pleasant between us."

"Dat ish so, and I vant you to forget about dat reward pizziness."

"It is forgotten, Moses."

"Dat ish goot, for dat poy, if he ish kilt peoples, save my life from t' river one time, and I don't forget it; vell, I vill call for you at t' right time to go to Mishter Melville's—vell, who ish dat?"

The last remark was caused by a light knock at the door, and opening it the next instant, there entered a tall, elegantly-formed man, dressed in the hight of fashion, and swinging in his hand a rattan cane.

He wore a soft hat, that cast in shadow the upper part of his face, while the lower portion was concealed by a heavy brown beard, and curls of a like hue clustered around his neck.

That he was a very handsome, elegant-looking man, both the Jew and the judge saw at a glance, and, as he was a stranger to them, they both turned pale, for, villains at heart, they each expected that they saw an officer of the law before them.

"I would see Mr. Moloch," said the stranger, calmly, and anxious to feel that he was not "wanted," Judge Shyster, losing his pomosity of manner, glided toward the door, and hastily pulled it to behind him, while he quickly descended to the street.

"I ish Moses Moloch," answered the Jew.

"So I see, and knew at a glance; well, old man; how are you?" answered the stranger, in pleasant tones, advancing toward the Jew, who replied, as he searchingly viewed his visitor:

"You ish got t' petter of me, mine frint."

"I am the first one who ever got the best of you, then, Moses, but I am glad my disguise deceives even your sharp eyes. Now, how are you?"

As the stranger spoke he drew from his face the brown beard, and from his head the curly wig he wore, and the dark, sinister, and yet handsome features of Royal Keene were revealed.

"Holy Isaacs! you ish so mooch changed; you ish a mooch pigger man ash you vas; but I ish so glat for to see you, Roy—"

"Hold! do not mention that name, Jew. My present name is Royal Keene, and I came all the way here from the West to see you, and get you to help me," and the man twirled at his long, jet-black mustache, which the light-brown beard had concealed, and ran his fingers caressingly through the wavy masses of raven hair,

that had been coiled up beneath the wig he had worn.

"I ish still your frint," and Moses Moloch crossed over and doubly bolted the door.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PLOT FOR RUIN.

In the elegantly-furnished parlors of a handsome St. Louis mansion, a man paced to and fro, his hands clasped behind his back, and his face wearing a look of determined resolve.

And one look into that face displayed the black, piercing eyes of the man known to the reader as Royal Keene, again, as when he entered the room of Moses Moloch, disguised by his beard and wig.

"I am glad that I arrived as I did, or the Jew would have married my sweet cousin to that rogue he is making use of," he muttered, in a low tone, and after an instant of silence he continued:

"Now the fair Louise must become my wife, and then I will get not only her wealth left her by her mother, but also the mine, for, after my marriage with her, my uncle will not live very long."

"She was sweet on me, years ago, when she was only fourteen, and I think I can win her back now, and old Moses will make my dear uncle consent, as he holds him financially in his power. Ah, I hear the rustle of silk—she is coming."

The next moment there glided into the room a maiden of surpassing beauty.

Tall, graceful in form, and with a willowy motion, she approached the man, while her dark eyes lighted up with a look of surprise as she saw that the face was unknown to her.

"The servant said you desired to see me, sir, but I think there is some mistake," she said, somewhat haughtily.

"No, I asked to see you, and I had hoped that I was not so easily forgotten by one who has ever been in my thoughts," said Royal Keene, in a low, earnest tone.

"Sir, I do not understand; there assuredly is some mistake."

"Louise, my sweet cousin, do you not recognize me now?"

The beard and wig were again torn off, and the bold, reckless, handsome face was revealed.

"Roy! Roy! my poor, misguided cousin," and the face of Louise Melville became very pale, and she stepped back as the man advanced toward her as though to take her hand.

"And this is my welcome, after four years of cruel absence!" he said, in a thrilling tone he knew well how to assume.

"How can I welcome you, Roy? You never should have come here again, and I hoped we should never meet after your cruel deed and flight, years ago. Oh, Roy! how much you have to repent of."

"Louise, do not upbraid me. I know better than all others, what my rash, ungovernable act has cost me, and how I have suffered none can ever know."

"I fled from home, and your good father aided me to escape from the hounds upon my track, and placed me in a position where I could earn my daily bread."

"In that new land, under another name than the one I had disgraced, I have worked hard, by day and night, and repented me bitterly of the past."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Roy; we feared you had not changed, and were as wild and reckless as ever."

"No, I am a changed man, and you are the bright angel, Louise, that made me a new creature, for your sweet face, as I remembered it, when you were but a girl, has been in my thoughts by day and night, and at length drove me here, risking my life, to see you."

He spoke in an impassioned tone and in a voice singularly sweet and winning; but Louise Melville answered:

"I am glad you are a better man, cousin Roy, yet, oh! so sorry that you came here. Remember, if you are taken, a death on the gallows awaits you."

"I know it, Louise, and I have risked that to come and tell you that I love you, and beg you to become my wife."

He dropped upon one knee before her, seized her hand, and thus remained, as if awaiting his doom from her fair lips.

In the olden time she had always loved her handsome cousin, wild as he was, and it was through her entreaty that her father had aided him to fly from the hounds of the law upon his trail; but when she grew older and realized how very evil he was at heart, and knew what a cruel murderer he had been, her heart revolted against its early idol, and she hoped never to see him again.

Now, though running a terrible risk, he appeared before her, and boldly from his lips came the avowal that love for her had brought him there.

Since her girlhood days Louise Melville's heart had held no man as an idol, and wholly pure in character herself, she had banished from her all thought of the cousin who, had he been

true to himself, might have one day claimed her as his wife.

Now, only pity for his past life, and a dread that he would be captured filled her heart, and she said, firmly:

"Cousin Roy, you plead in vain. I can never love you, and you must accept this decision as final, and at once leave this city."

The man's face was hidden from her, and she failed to see the dark look that flashed across it, but, having failed in winning her by a confession of his love, he determined to try to frighten her into accepting him.

"Very well, Louise," he said, sadly; "without your love I wish to die, for I have nothing to live for, and I will go at once to the Chief of Police and give myself up."

"You will do no such silly thing; you fled to save your life, and you will not now go and mount the gallows."

"Leave St. Louis at once, forget me, and spend your days in trying to repent the past."

"By Heaven! there is some one else that you love!" he cried, almost savagely, his passionate nature getting beyond his control, for he had always loved his cousin, as much as he was capable of loving any one, and now felt a pang of jealous fury at the thought that another stood between him and her.

"I love no man, excepting my father, Roy, and I thank Heaven I never allowed myself to love you; but, quick! resume your disguise, for the bell has rung."

In spite of his assertion of the moment before about giving himself up to the police, Royal Keene, as I will still call him, resumed his disguise with alacrity, and his face was as pleasant as May morning, when the parlor door opened and an elderly gentleman entered.

"Ah, my daughter, Thomas told me I would find you here with company," and Mr. Melville, whose hair and whiskers were iron-gray, approached the spot where Louise and her cousin stood.

Seeing the embarrassment of his cousin, Royal Keene at once advanced a step and said:

"A prodigal returns and asks to be forgiven, uncle."

"What! have you dared to put your foot in my house, sir?" cried Mr. Melville, angrily.

"I have risked the life you saved from the gallows, uncle, to come and ask forgiveness of my past crimes; do you cast me utterly out of your heart?"

"Your own act, sir, your crimes, cast you out; in cold blood you shot down a fellow-being, and then to save your neck from the gallows you killed the man who guarded you and escaped."

"To save you from an ignominious death I gave you money and sent you far away, where you found employment that should have given you a fair living, in workinga mine."

"After you left, I paid your forged checks, sir, and thousands in debts, until I crammed myself in money matters for you, and now you dare to put your foot across my threshold! Be gone, sir, or I myself will repent of my accursed foolishness and hand you over to the police."

The old man spoke in an angry, decided tone, while his wicked nephew stood with bowed head before him, and Louise, with tearful eyes, was at her father's side.

"Uncle, you are cruelly unkind, after the effort I have made to repent my past sins; I worked your mine faithfully, barely getting from it sufficient to live upon—"

"No, the mine is not a bonanza, I know; still there is gold enough in it to support you handsomely, if you will work it, and only a few weeks ago I had the papers all drawn up, selling it to you, under your assumed name, for a mere pittance which I had pretended to have received; but now, sir, these papers I will to-morrow take from my safe and destroy, in punishment for your daring to come here."

"Now, sir, leave this house, or I swear to you I will give you up to the police."

"Uncle!"

"Not one word, sir! Begone!"

"Louise, my cousin, will you not plead for me?"

"I cannot, Roy; it is better that you go."

"Enough! I am alone in the world, for my own kindred have cast me utterly out of their hearts. Farewell, uncle! Farewell, Louise!"

He turned sadly toward the door, but, as he had hoped, no word of recall came to him, and he passed out of the door and into the street, just as two men ascended the broad marble steps leading to the Melville mansion.

Those two men were Moses Moloch, the Jew, and Judge Shyster.

"Vell?" asked the Jew, in a low tone.

"She refused me, and he banished me from his house; I will see you at your room," said Royal Keene, as he walked away with dignified step, while Moses Moloch muttered to himself:

"Vell, if he ish don't marry the girl, my dear yoong frint Marmaduke must pe her husband."

The next moment Thomas opened the door and the two men were ushered into the library, bent on a devilish plot against Mr. Melville and his beautiful daughter.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

WHEN Thomas announced to his master that Mr. Moses Moloch and Judge Shyster were in the library and desirous of seeing him, Mr. Melville turned a shade paler, for he feared that trouble was brewing for him.

Entering the room where his visitors awaited him, he was met by the Jew with a bland smile.

"Ah, my dear, we ish come to see you on a matter dat ish so very particular; ish dat not so, shudge?"

"I have the honor of saying that it is," pomously replied the judge.

"Be seated, gentlemen, and tell me how I can serve you," said Mr. Melville, with a resigned kind of manner.

Both took seats, and sinking into an easy-chair near, Mr. Melville continued:

"Now, Mr. Moloch, I suppose you come regarding those notes of mine that will soon be due?"

"My dear, I have come upon a matter of love;" but seeing a frown gathering upon the face of Mr. Melville the Jew added quickly, "but it ish not me dat ish in love, but my young frint Marmaduke, who loves your sweet daughter mit excruciating affection."

"Then why does not Mr. Marmaduke speak for himself?"

"I vill tell you, my dear; he ish a very modest young man, and he ish a orphan, too, and I ish have de control of all his monish."

"You?"

"Yes, Mishter Melville, my dear."

"Ah!"

The Jew hardly knew how to interpret that exclamation, but continued:

"Mishter Marmaduke ish a sweet yoong man what I love very much, and he ish come of good family in New Yorick, who leave him a very rich yoong man, for I have hundreds of thousands of dollars dat pelong to de sweet yoong man."

"I see; he desired you, as his banker, to make a formal offering for the hand of my daughter?"

"Dat ish so, my dear."

"Well, Mr. Marmaduke certainly appears to be a gentleman, and he is reported very rich."

"Rich as a prince, my dear sir, rich as a prince," put in Judge Shyster, while the Jew said, *sotto voce*:

"For t'irty days."

"What is it you say, Mr. Moloch?" asked Mr. Melville.

"I ish say dat in t'irty days my yoong frint vill pe a millionaire, as dere ish more monish coming to him as what he has got."

"I desire my daughter's happiness, Mr. Moloch, more than I do riches; but if Mr. Marmaduke loves Louise, and she returns that love, I see no reason why they should not make a match."

"Dat ish so, my dear. Now when vill I get me pay for the monish I let you have?" asked the wily Jew.

Mr. Melville seemed greatly embarrassed for an instant; but then said bluntly:

"Moloch, you must renew that paper for me, as all I have is so invested that I cannot pay the cash now."

"Ah, my dear, dat ish very pad, ish dat not so, shudge?"

"It certainly is, sir; bad for Mr. Melville, especially as the notes are so worded as to control every piece of property he holds in the world."

"None know that, gentlemen, better than I do myself; but I tell you the truth, I cannot pay them now; but I can pay the interest, and if renewed for six months, can then attend to them safely."

"Mishter Melville, my dear, I ish need dat monish very pad; but if your daughter ish going to marry my yoong frint Marmaduke in short time, I t'ink I can renew dese notes, for he ish so rich dat I know he vill pay dese notes next time if you ish cannot do so."

The face of Mr. Melville brightened, but he said after a moment's thought:

"I will not sacrifice my daughter's happiness, remember, sir."

"Holy Isaacs! sacrifice t'e happiness of de dear yoong lady py making her marry dat sweet poy Marmaduke?" cried the Jew, in surprise, while Judge Shyster, whose eyes rested upon a decanter of brandy, standing on the sideboard in the adjoining room, said quickly:

"A spirited youth, sir, and rich as a prince."

"If my daughter consents to receive the attentions of Mr. Marmaduke, you renew those notes for six months?"

"If t'e dear yoong lady vill pledge herself to marry t'e dear poy Marmaduke, say in t'ree mont's, den I ish vill renew dese notes for six mont's more."

"I will speak to her upon the subject—oh, she is here."

As Mr. Melville spoke, Louise glided into the room, her face pale, and her eyes sad-looking.

The Jew immediately sprung to his feet, as did also Judge Shyster, and bowed low, for they feared the haughty girl, both of them hav-

ing fallen under her bitter sarcasm several times before.

"Father, I did not intend to be an eavesdropper, but the doors were open, and I have heard all that passed between you and these—people; am I to understand that Mr. Moloch represents Mr. Marmaduke, and asks for my hand?"

"Mr. Marmaduke has requested Mr. Moloch, Louise, to satisfy me, as his banker, that he is possessed of wealth that renders him exceedingly comfortable, and if agreeable to me, and acceptable to you, he desires to offer himself to you."

"And if I accept his offer, Mr. Moloch, here, knowing that he holds Mr. Marmaduke's wealth in his hands, is willing to renew the notes he has against you?"

"That is just it, Louise," said Mr. Melville, anxiously.

"And if I refuse, papa?"

"Then I am ruined," groaned the poor man. For a few moments Louise Melville was silent, and then she said:

"When Mr. Marmaduke calls upon me I will explain to him that you are embarrassed financially, and only need time to work out of your difficulties, and this time will be given by Mr. Moses Moloch, banker at large, if I become Mrs. Noel Marmaduke."

"Then, if he is willing, although I do not exactly fancy Mr. Marmaduke, I will marry him, for marriage is a lottery at best, and I may be mistaken in the opinion I had formed of the gentleman."

There was something terribly cutting in her manner as well as her words, and both the Jew and the judge moved uneasily upon their seats, yet a gleam of triumph shot through the eyes of both.

"Gentlemen, I think nothing more need be said; I have given you my terms," and Louise bowed, as though anxious to dismiss the disagreeable visitors, who, she felt, were to reap benefit in some way by her marriage with Noel Marmaduke, yet, if she saved her father, she did not care.

"Vell, I vill send the dear boy arount to see you, my dear. Now, Mishter Melville, I would like to ask you if you vill sell me dot leetle mine you ish have out West?"

Mr. Melville started, for it brought back to him the unwelcome visit of his wicked nephew a short while before; but, anxious to dispose of the mine, as it was comparatively valueless, and he did not intend that his nephew should longer control it, he said:

"The mine panned out well at one time, Moloch, and then fell off sadly; but I believe there is gold to be found there if it is properly worked, though it would cost considerable for the machinery to work it."

"It ish not wort' much, my dear; but I ish have a nephew, t'e son of my dear sisther Rebecca, what ish a wild young man, and I ish desire to send him out dere to work."

"Ah," and Mr. Melville and Louise both thought of the "wild young man" that had before been sent out there, while Judge Shyster said:

"Mines are comparatively worthless, now, and I have the honor to have the opinion that gold and silver will soon cease to exist in the recesses of the earth."

"Dot ish so, shudge; vell, Mishter Melville, I vill give you ten thousand dollars cash for dat mine, to make it a present to dat wild young nephew."

But the Jew's cunning overshot the mark; not with Mr. Melville, but with Louise, who knew that her father had been trying to sell the mine for as little as two thousand dollars, and could not dispose of it for that.

Through her active brain flashed the remembrance of her cousin's visit, and that he had always been the Jew's friend before he fled from St. Louis, and she had observed that he spoke to Moses Moloch as he passed out of the house, for she had stood at the window and saw it.

Just as her father was about to grab at the tempting bait offered, Louise said, quickly:

"Papa, as I am willing to do what I can to save you from financial ruin, I wish you to do me a favor."

"Anything in my power, my daughter."

"Then, do not sell the Valley Mine, but make me a wedding present of it."

Mr. Melville looked a little disappointed, and the look was plainly reflected upon the faces of his visitors; he wanted that ten thousand dollars, which he needed, sadly, and they wanted the mine.

Seeing the look, Louise said, quickly:

"Father, if you need any ready money just now, you know my jewels will bring you in more than is offered for the mine."

"I ish not a mean man, my dear, and I will give twenty thousand dollars rather than see you sell your pretty jewels."

"Father, I wish the Valley Mine as a wedding present," said Louise, firmly, and promptly Mr. Melville answered:

"And you shall have it, my daughter."

Instantly Louise Melville turned upon the two visitors, whose looks plainly showed annoyance, and said:

"Gentlemen, as there is now no more business

to transact, I will kindly ask you to excuse my father, as he has an engagement with me."

The Jew and the judge arose together, and after a few words, left the mansion, passing on the steps a gentleman slowly ascending.

He eyed them, with one glance seeming to read them, and they looked at him suspiciously, for he was one who would attract admiration and respect anywhere.

"Holy Isaacs! Who ish dat?" said the Jew.

"He looks like a prince," said the judge, whose mind always ran on royalty, and looking back they saw the stranger enter the door, and just then they were confronted by Royal Keeno in his clever disguise.

"Who is that man, Moses?" he asked, hastily.

"Dat ish just what I ish like to know, my dear."

"Yes, we were just discussing him," added the judge.

"He looks like a man whom I killed just before I left the West; that is, his bearing and form are the same, though his face is different."

"A man you ish kill?" asked Moses, in horror, while the judge said, devoutly:

"Souls of the dead saints, protect us!"

"Yes; he is the man I told you that I believed possessed the secret about the Valley Mine; I shot him, for dead men tell no tales, and he was a dangerous foe, for his name was Buffalo Bill."

"Buffler Beel! I have heard me of dot man."

"Buffalo Bill! I have also heard of him as the Prince of Prairie men," added the judge.

"Well, that man is his exact form and bearing, though his face is that of an English nobleman I saw on the plains; I am puzzled, Moses."

"Dat ish pad; I don't like me puzzles," and the Jew and the judge passed on, while Royal Keeno turned into a by-street anxious to solve the identity of the stranger who had entered the Melville mansion: a moment after the visitors left the house and walked slowly away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VILLAIN'S TRIUMPH.

MR. MELVILLE'S servant, Thomas, had not seen the Jew and the judge take their departure, and when he answered the bell and was confronted by a tall, elegant-looking stranger, he told him that his master was busily engaged just then with visitors.

The stranger took from his pocket a letter, and handed it to Thomas with the request that he would see that it reached his master, and then he wended his way up toward the hotel, slowly followed by Royal Keene, who seemed more than ever puzzled by the appearance of the man he was tracking.

Finding that the visitors had really gone, Thomas at once presented the letter, and glancing hastily over it, Mr. Melville sprung to his feet, crying:

"How absurd, Thomas, for you not to know I did not have company. Why, that was Lord Varian Elphistone, of England, whom you turned away, and I must at once go to the hotel and bring him back with me. See here, Louise," and Mr. Melville, who was always impressed by a title, turned to his daughter, and said:

"I have here a letter from my old friend Carmack, of Omaha, introducing to me Lord Varian Elphistone, of England, who has come to America on account of his brother having been killed on the plains a year or so ago."

"Carmack says that Lord Varian will stop in St. Louis for a few days, and can give me information highly important to me, so I will at once go to the hotel and bring him back as our guest. Thomas, order Richard at once around with the carriage."

The butler departed, and a short while after Mr. Melville was ready for his visit, and while waiting for the carriage suddenly confronted a personage whom Thomas had ushered into the library.

This visitor was a rather fine-looking young man of thirty, dressed in the height of fashion, and yet in his face there was a look of dissipation and weakness that was observable at a second glance.

His manner was somewhat nervous, and his eyes never lingered long on any one object, and did not meet one's look honestly.

"Ah, Mr. Marmaduke, walk in," and Mr. Melville extended his hand to the visitor, who said, somewhat anxiously:

"Have you seen my banker, Mr. Moloch, sir?"

"Yes, he was here, and told me you had done me the honor to desire to marry my child."

"True, sir; I have loved her devotedly, and she has ever treated me with such kindness that I was bold enough to hope to win her hand, with your consent, and I asked Moloch to make known that I was able to support your beautiful daughter equally as luxuriously as the style in which she is now living," and Noel Marmaduke glanced around him at the elegant room.

"Mr. Marmaduke, it is no easy thing for an old man to give up his idol to another; but I seek my daughter's happiness, and, as I have never heard other than words of praise regarding you, I give my consent as frankly as you ask it; but there are some disagreeable terms

I believe, which Louise will explain to you; now pray excuse me, as I go to call upon Lord Varian Elphistone, who is to be my guest; and, by the way, remain to dinner with us."

Mr. Melville left the room and Noel Marmaduke, a weak tool in the hands of the cunning Jew, a forger and a convict, could ill conceal his delight at the rainbow hues his life had assumed.

"By Jove! John F. Jones alias Noel Marmaduke, you are in luck, my boy, and if you are not an honored member of society from now henceforth it will be your own fault—Ah, here comes the divine Louise, the belle of St. Louis," and he turned to greet the maiden who swept into the room with a haughty majesty that awed the designing villain, notwithstanding he possessed any amount of requisite effrontery.

"Ah, Miss Louise, I have come to receive at your lips my sentence for life, or worse than death," he said, in an affected way that was not disagreeable.

"As far as was in his power so to do, Mr. Marmaduke, your banker, Mr. Moses Moloch, has settled your fate, if, as I understand, you desire to marry me."

Noel Marmaduke was almost discomfited at the cool manner of the maiden, and said, hesitatingly:

"I hope Mr. Moloch did not take it upon himself to do more than I requested; that is, make known to your father that I was possessed of a large fortune, which I wished to honor myself by laying at your feet."

"I thank you, sir, for the honor done me; Mr. Moloch so stated the matter, and, as I have met you in society and we have danced together, flirted together, and I never found you either a bore or disagreeable companion, I said I was willing to become Mrs. Marmaduke, for it is a pretty name, and nowadays love is at such a discount in wedded life that I felt we could get along together delightfully."

The man winced under the tone and words, yet answered:

"My whole object in life would be to make you happy, Louise."

"But there is a condition, sir, that I beg to make known to you."

"Ah, and what, pray?" asked the villain, who had been well schooled by the Jew.

"Financially, my father is in trouble; he lost heavily in one speculation, and borrowed largely to retrieve his losses and again lost."

Confident of regaining by other speculations his losses, he borrowed again from Mr. Moloch, giving his notes, secured by all he is worth, for the sums thus obtained.

"Those notes are now due, with three days' grace, and I am unable to aid my father, as my fortune is in the hands of trustees, who will only turn it over to me when I reach my eighteenth birthday—so reads the will—and I now lack some six months of being the required age."

"But, Miss Melville, if you need money for any purpose, why I—"

"No, no, listen to me," and Louise interrupted the man, whose reckless offer gained for him just what he thought it would, as it raised him in the estimation of the girl.

"I thank you, Mr. Marmaduke, but Mr. Moloch said he would renew my father's notes for six months, thereby giving him time to recuperate his fallen fortunes, if I would pledge myself to marry you, for he felt then he would perhaps hold a double security."

"Assuredly, I will indorse—"

"No; I said I would explain the matter to you, and more, I will, the day I become your wife, give you full power of attorney over my property, which would secure you, should my father again fail in his hopes, and lose the property he now has."

It was fortunate for Noel Marmaduke that he seldom looked any one in the eyes, or Louise would have seen the evil glitter of delight of the man, as he listened to her words.

"Louise," and he approached and took her hand; "you are a noble woman, and I only hope I will be worthy of you; when will you name the day when I will be made happy in calling you wife?"

"In three months, if it suits you," was the almost indifferent reply, and she added:

"Now, if you desire, you can accompany me for a drive, and return for dinner, as we will have company," and leaving the man to gloat over his victory, the maiden retired to her room, but soon returned ready for the drive, and behind a stylish pair of ponies which she drove herself, the newly-engaged couple were whirled rapidly through the streets, many a beautiful girl envying Louise Melville for having captivated the heart of the young millionaire, Noel Marmaduke.

Alas! had they known the ghastly truth, even the most envious heart would have pitied her.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MIDNIGHT INTRUDERS.

"LORD VARIAN ELPHISTONE, my intended son-in-law, Mr. Noel Marmaduke; Mr. Marmaduke, Lord Varian Elphistone, of England," and Mr. Melville rolled the nobleman's name

over in his mouth, as though it left a sweet taste to pronounce it.

The two men bowed, and Noel Marmaduke offering his hand, the Englishman took it, and then, passing his hand lightly through his blonde curls, and then caressingly over his equally as blonde beard, he said:

"I am glad to meet Mr. Marmaduke."

But Noel Marmaduke could not say as much, for there was a certain searching look in the eyes of the nobleman that the villain did not like: it rendered him uneasy, and his manner was more nervous than usual, and he wished he had not promised to remain to dinner.

Just then Louise entered, looking superbly beautiful in her canary silk and sweeping train, and at the introduction to the nobleman, greeted him with a quiet and refined grace that seemed to win him at once to like her.

At dinner, over a glass of wine, Lord Varian made himself intensely interesting, though there was a certain affectation in his voice and manner which Louise did not particularly fancy, her father set down as a habit of the English nobility, and Noel Marmaduke voted mentally was "deuced vulgar."

In listening to the adventures of the Englishman upon the plains, the hours glided unheeded by, and it was late when Noel Marmaduke arose to take his leave.

Then it was, as they stood together, that Louise Melville compared the two men, and there came to her heart the knowledge that she had made a mistake: the man before her nearly filled her beau ideal of manhood, and by his side Noel Marmaduke was a mere nobody.

As soon as her betrothed lover had departed, Louise also withdrew, and then came to her lips, as she threw herself upon the lounge in her own room, four words:

"It might have been."

Dismissing her maid, by saying that she would undress herself, Louise sat in the moonlighted chamber, and her thoughts were busy, for she had that 'ay promised to marry a man whom she now knew she would never love as a wife should love a husband.

Thus sitting in dreary thought, she heard Thomas show Lord Varian to his room, and then her father's step passed, going to retire for the night: then all was still, and yet she remained dressed and in deep reverie.

At length she thought she heard a step and listened. No, it was but a fancy, for why should any one be moving in the hall after midnight?

Had she followed her first determination to go to the door and glance out, she would have beheld a tall form slowly descending the broad stairs.

Had she followed, she would have seen that same form enter the parlors, and throwing himself down upon a divan near the bay window, she would have heard him mutter:

"After my life on the prairies, I find it hard to sleep in luxury, so will sit here and enjoy a smoke, and if the fellow whose shadow I saw in the yard means mischief, I'll be on hand to trump his little game."

"By Jove! but what a beauty that Louise Melville is, and to think she is engaged to be married to that dressed-up dandy, whose face I do not like, for if he is not a thoroughbred villain, at least he belies his looks."

"I wish I could get the fellow out on the plains once; I think I could lose him there, and prevent his bringing many a tear to the eyes of that lovely girl."

"And I don't believe she cares for him—Ah! what is that?"

Had Louise still been secretly looking on she would have seen the guest of her father quickly rise to his feet and glide toward the large window at the back of the parlor, and which looked out upon the back yard, and then start back into the shadow, for the moonlight streamed brightly in through the raised sash.

"Ha!" he exclaimed; "it is the form of a man, cast in shadow on the yard; and where can he be but upon the house-top, to cast a shadow there? and there is a rope in his hand."

"I'll watch for future developments, for there is being some devil's game played in this house to-night."

He stepped back and silently awaited, and soon a rope dropped in front of the window; next dangling feet appeared, followed by the form of a man.

Resting upon the window-sill the midnight visitor leaped lightly into the room, at the same time giving the rope by which he had descended three distinct jerks, as though for a signal.

Then he glided across the room, not noticing the tall form standing in the shadow of the curtain.

The next moment he disappeared in the uncertain light out of the front parlor into the hall.

Lord Varian was about to follow the intruder, when the rope again shook violently, and swayed from side to side.

"Another one coming down; a pair of rogues," muttered the Englishman, and he again shrunk back in the curtain's folds.

Again a form appeared and a large, stout man entered the parlor, but gave no signal with the rope as the other had done.

Then, like a tiger springing upon his prey, Lord Varian sprung upon him.

There was a loud, startled cry, a muttered oath and a fierce struggle followed, while running feet were heard and a tall form dashed into the room.

It was the first intruder through the window, and he rushed to the aid of his confederate in crime; but a violent blow in the face sent him reeling upon the floor.

But, with a cry of rage he again rushed forward, and then followed a short, fierce combat, and one man sunk upon the floor, while a second bounded out of the open window, just as Mr. Melville and Thomas the butler rushed in with lights, and behind them, still clad in her canary silk, came Louise, pale-faced and startled. Then followed a momentary tableau, and it was a striking one.

CHAPTER XX.

A STARTLING METAMORPHOSIS.

WHEN Thomas, frightened most out of his wits, and wholly cut of his dignity, turned up the gas, a strange sight met the eyes of Mr. Melville and Louise.

Back near the window stood a tall form, and at his feet lay a man held there by a foot upon his breast.

But the two men were unknown to Mr. Melville and his daughter, the prostrate one being evidently a burly ruffian, and the other with a dark, handsome face and long blonde hair falling upon his shoulders, while in his hands he held a mass of brown hair.

"Well, sir, who are you, and what does this mean?" asked Mr. Melville, sternly.

"It means, my dear sir, that, unable to sleep, and seeing a fellow lurking in your yard, I came down to your parlors, and surprised this man and an accomplice getting into your house."

"And who are you, sir?"

"Ah, I forgot," and the stranger rubbed his hand over his face, and continued:

"I am your guest, Lord Varian Elphistone, and I tell you frankly, sir, I was disguised, and why I will explain at another time; this disguise I stripped from the face and head of the man who sprung through the window as you entered," and the speaker held up to view a long brown beard and wig.

"I confess I do not understand all this, sir; but as you hold a prisoner there, you evidently are friendly to me, though your appearing, too, in disguise puzzles me; now, sir, who are you?" and Mr. Melville approached the prostrate ruffian.

"I'm only a poor devil, caught in house-breaking," was the surly reply, and he added:

"That's the way it goes; he's escaped, and I'm bagged."

"And your companion, who was he?" asked Mr. Melville.

"It won't be pleasant for you to hear, as he's your own flesh and blood."

"What!" gasped Mr. Melville.

"It's ther truth; we was old pals together long ago, and you best know why he came here to rob you."

"Do you mean that it was my wicked nephew?"

"Just what I do mean, boss," was the sullen answer.

Louise bowed her head in shame, and Mr. Melville seemed deeply moved, while the latter said:

"My lord, I will let that man go, for I dare not bring him to justice; here, fellow, begone from here, and tell that dastardly nephew of mine that my pride causes me to spare both him and you, now, but, if you ever cross my path again, the law's clutches shall fall upon you."

"Thank you, sir; I, for one, will never let you see me again, and to prove my thanks for your kindness, I'll tell you, frankly, your nephew came after the papers that made him owner of your Western mine, and he was cracking your safe in the library, when this iron-handed man seized me."

"Ha! that is his game, is it? There is some mystery in all this that I cannot fathom. Now, sir, begone, and bear the message I gave you to that dastard nephew of mine."

He led the way to where Thomas stood trembling in the hall, and the next instant the butler gave the burly villain a kick, as he slipped out of the front door.

"Miss Melville, forgive me for entering your house in disguise, and under an assumed name, but I will explain my reasons if you will both give me a few moments' audience, and it is necessary that my identity should not be known even to your servant."

"Thomas is faithful, sir, and I suppose I should thank you for what you have done, but I confess I am wholly mystified," said Louise coldly.

"Mr. Melville, I will now offer the explanation which I intended to make to morrow, sir," and, as Mr. Melville bowed assent for him to continue, he went on, speaking no longer in the affected tone he had assumed as Lord Varian, but in a deep, manly voice that seemed natural to him.

"I am so far from being Lord Varian Elphistone," he said, "that I will confess, candidly, that I am only a prairie-man, a Government Scout and Indian-fighter, if you will."

"But I met the nobleman, whose name I assumed, and in searching for the body of his brother, slain over a year ago, strange circumstances were developed, which caused me to know that there was a crime committed."

"In following the man I suspected of foul play, I was led to a mine, where I knew he kept one or more men working for him, and upon trailing him there, I discovered a man dying, having been basely struck down by the very person I was in pursuit of."

"It seems that this miner, whose real name was Alfred Buckner—"

"Alfred Buckner?" said Mr. Melville, quickly; "he was one of my boyhood friends, but, poor fellow, he went to the bad; and he it was whom you found wounded, poor fellow?"

"Yes, Mr. Melville; he died while I sat by his side, and he told me that the mine had suddenly begun to pan out rich, for a vein had been struck by him of vast wealth."

"This fact he made known to his employer, who did not own the mine, but who determined to at once get possession of it, and to keep its riches a secret until he held it as his own."

"But, because the old miner, who went by the name of Buck, would not agree to his defrauding the rightful owner, he lost his life, as his employer sprung upon him, and left him, as he believed, dead."

"Fortunately I found him before he died, and from him learned the truth."

"While there, after the death of the miner, the murderer returned and surprised me, very nearly ending my days; but I escaped, and since then he has been upon my track, fearing that I possessed the secret he wished concealed in the grave."

"Again meeting him he attempted my life, and his bullet cut along here, and, as I was stunned and fell, he believed he had slain me and fled."

"I followed him, and finding that he had come East, to defraud the owner out of his mine, I came, too, and, to disguise myself, with the sanction of my friend, Lord Varian Elphistone, I assumed his name, and disguised myself thoroughly in a blonde wig and beard."

"Ah, and I am the one that was to be defrauded?" asked Mr. Melville, with interest.

"You are, sir, and the man who was to defraud you left a few minutes ago, and was, I am sorry to say, your nephew, whom we know on the border as Royal Keene, and the Indians call the Death Shot, for, in spite of his crimes, he has proved himself a daring and splendid frontiersman."

"How low he has fallen; had I known this, I would have given him over to the officers of the law; but, sir, what do I not owe you, as you have served me well, and bring me news of riches, which just now I sadly need."

"Your mine is a bonanza, sir, and my advice is that you at once go West and work it for all it is worth. As for your nephew, he will at once return to the border, I am confident, but his career is narrowing down, and ere long must end, for I have sworn to trail him to the bitter end, and it shall be his life or mine."

"I will not say a word against it, sir; but now are we to address you now?"

"Still as Lord Varian, while I am in St. Louis, but my real name is Colv, though I am better known by my border sobriquet of Buffalo Bill."

Both Mr. Melville and Louise started at the name, for they had often heard it before, and it was hard to realize that this handsome, refined-looking man was the famous Indian-hunter, so well known along the border, and whose life had been a series of wonderful adventures.

"Under the name of Buffalo Bill, I know you well, sir, and I will be glad to return with you to the border, and my daughter shall accompany us, if she cares to go."

"Yes, papa, I will gladly go, for I think I shall enjoy it immensely," and after a few more words of conversation, Louise Melville returned to her room, and at her heart was a dull pain, for she now admired the Scout far more than she had in his disguise, and she knew that she had at last met her beau ideal, though, alas! too late! too late! for she was now the promised bride of Noel Marmaduke.

CHAPTER XXI.

A TRIO OF PLOTTERS.

THE day following the midnight intrusion into the Melville mansion, Moses Moloch sat in his comfortless room, in earnest conversation with Judge Shyster, and a man in whom, despite another wig and beard, spectacles and a high hat, the reader can recognize Royal Keene.

"And you say that my uncle starts for the West to look after the interests of his mine?" said Royal Keene, a frown darkening his face.

"Yes, he is to go in a few days, and I am to go with him."

"You?" asked Royal Keene in disguise.

"Yes, I am to advance him the monish to work the mine, and he is to give me one-fourth interest in the receipts."

"I understand it now; that was that English noble after all, and he had been told by Buffalo Bill, curse him, that a rich vein had been struck, and he determined to thwart me by coming and making known the secret. I wish I had killed him last night, as I did Buffalo Bill, three weeks ago."

"Yes, it would have been better so, my dear; but you is not tell me about your frint."

"Red Dave?"

"Yes, dot ish his name."

"Ah, I saw him but a moment, and he has struck for New York, where he will continue to exercise his talents. He said the Englishman handled him hard, and he intended taking my uncle's advice. Bah! what cowards men are, to thus dread death."

"That ish so, my dear; ish it not, Shudge?"

"Of course it is, Moses; mankind are generally cowards at heart."

"Well, I suppose this lord will now try and marry my sweet cousin."

"Ife ish go back mit them to the border."

"With them! is Louise Melville to go with her father?" and Royal Keene sprung to his feet, his eyes ablaze.

"Yes; Misster Melville ish to have his daughter go mit him; I vill go, too, and the shudge go mit me as my lawyer."

"Well, you will be two stupid old idiots if you do not work into my plans: one man on the border I feared, and that was Buffalo Bill; but I sent a bullet through his brain before I left, and the Englishman I do not dread; I will yet possess that mine, and you, Moses, and you also, Judge, shall reap a rich reward if you will do as I wish."

"You ish a goot poy, my dear, and I vill listen to you," warily said the Jew.

"Well, I will immediately return to the border, and once there I know where I can find men to aid me in anything I dare undertake, and Arthur Melville shall sign deeds giving me the mine; then leave him and his lovely daughter to me."

"And my frint Marmaduke: what of him, my dear?"

"Why, he shall marry Louise Melville, and then come in for her property, which of course we will get the lion's share of, for I tell you, Moses, I am revengeful now against both Louise and her father, and their money I will yet revel in. Aid me, and I will do well by you, but betray me, and you two will wish you had never been born."

The reckless man walked to and fro, and in his face there was a look of fiendish deviltry, which really alarmed those who watched him anxiously.

"Now, Moloch, I want money, for I will leave here to-night."

"How much you ish vant, my dear?"

"Give me a thousand dollars."

Without a word, the Jew counted it out and handed it to him, and he turned toward the door, saying:

"You will find me in Denver. I will visit you secretly there upon your arrival, for it is best that you do not recognize me in public. Au revoir, gentlemen."

The next instant the door closed behind him, and the Jew said quietly:

"That ish a goot young man, shudge, and I will ne his partner in to mine."

"Yes, Moses, it will be a good speculation for us."

"For me, shudge, my dear."

"Ah!"

"But you ish vill po vell paid, shudge, for you ish my lawyer."

"Thanks, Moses; my fees will be according to your—your—earnings, I may say: but is it not a dangerous country to go to, this wild West, where the untamed savage roams over the prairie?"

"It ish not a healthy country, shudge, my dear; but, dere ish much monish to be made py our going dere, and who would harm two such honest men like us?"

"That is true, Moses; the good at heart need fear no evil—ahem! but I will leave you now, and, by the way, can you lend me an X?"

"Yes, my dear; but you vill keep sober if you ish desire to have me for a frint."

"Of course, Moses: ah, thanks: I'll see you in the morning," and the pompous "judge" left the Jew to his own reflections, which seemed not unpleasant, as he said to himself:

"Yes, I am to get to wealth of Misster Melville, and to monish of his daughter, and to mine, and I will have my revenge: den I will get dat poy to leave to country, for I don't wish him to die mit te gallows, and de shudge and Marmaduke, I will pay me sometings, and den I will have all, all—my revenge, and all de monish, he! he! he!" and the fiendish old plotter laughed in delight at his plans of deviltry he had in view.

Ten days after a small party took train for the Far West, where they were going to meet dangers they little dreamed of, for the trusting old man, Anton Melville, and his lovely daughter did not know that the Jew, the judge and Noel Marmaduke, who accompanied them, were like vampires whom death alone could shake off.

"I thought my Lord Varian Elphistone was to accompany you, Mr. Melville?" said Judge Shyster, inquiringly, as he did not see the supposed nobleman in their midst.

"He did intend to, sir, but he had important business that prevented his going with us," answered Mr. Melville.

"And he ish gone pack to England, my dear?" half-way suggested Moses Moloch.

"I really cannot tell you what plans Lord Varian had in view; he left my house three days ago."

"Ish dot so?" and the Jew seemed glad to feel that one man, who might have proven trouble some, had been so easily gotten rid of. Had he known that the supposed nobleman was the very man whom Royal Keene had said he had killed, and was at that moment at Omaha, following on the trail of the wicked nephew of Anton Melville, neither Moses Moloch, Judge Shyster nor Noel Marmaduke would have felt at all comfortable as they were whirled westward at the rate of thirty miles an hour, blindly following Fate.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BURNING CABIN.

THE Pawnee Motte, the scene of the break down of the Star Eye, when following with revengeful determination upon the trail of the Death Shot, was a favorite camping-place of the people of Red Heart, and when the old chief arrived and found his daughter very ill, though tenderly nursed by Beaver Ben, he determined to remain for some time in the vicinity of the grove of timber.

Having filled his duty as nurse until the arrival of Red Heart, Beaver Ben at once departed for McPherson, and Star Eye was placed in the skillful hands of the medicine-man of the tribe, who rapidly brought her back to health once more, though she refused to have anything to say about the cause of her illness, and only by her words of delirium could the red-skins who cared for her discover a reason for her strange and dangerous sickness which had so nearly proven fatal to her.

One day, weeks after the day that Jack Nelson and Beaver Ben had found her in the motte, Star Eye was seated in front of her tepee, engaged in beading a pair buckskin moccasins.

Looking up from her work, afar off upon the prairie she saw a horseman coming toward the village, and before long her keen eyes told her that it was a pale-face and not one of the warriors of her tribe.

Nearer and nearer he came, and the bronzed skin of the maiden deepened in hue, as she recognized the only man of all others to her.

It was Buffalo Bill, mounted upon a dark-bay horse, and with Brigham trotting behind and serving as a pack animal.

Riding straight up to the tepee the Scout dismounted and said, pleasantly:

"I am glad to see the Star Eye is again well; it was kind of her to remember me, and I have brought for her and her father some presents."

"The Star Eye is glad to see the great white chief Pa-he-has-ka*, but she will remember him without presents," answered the girl, quietly.

"No; she must accept these gifts," and taking from the pack, which Brigham had borne, a number of trinkets, of beads and little things greatly prized by Indian maidens, the Scout poured them in her lap, just as Red Heart advanced.

"The white chief is welcome," he said, with calm dignity, while his eyes glittered as he glanced at the presents.

"Pa-he-has-ka knows that he has Red Heart for a friend, and he has come to see him; he wishes the great Pawnee chief to serve him, and he has brought him a many-shooting rifle, pistols and a knife that will make his enemies fly before him, as leaves before a north wind."

As Buffalo Bill spoke he took from the pack one of Evans's magnificent thirty-four shooting rifles, a pair of ivory-handled revolvers and a silver-mounted Bowie-knife.

These, with ammunition and other things prized by Indian warriors, he handed to the chief, who seemed delighted with them, calling the Scout his brother.

"Now, how can Red Heart serve the white chief?" he asked.

"Let the Red Heart and his people go to the buffalo-lands on the Kiowa creek, and camp there until they hear from Pa-he-has-ka; but, let my brother not say that he or his braves have seen the Buffalo Killer."

"The ears of the Red Heart are open: he will do as the Buffalo-Killer desires; he will leave when the sun comes next."

Accepting the hospitality of the Indians for a few hours, and leaving his horse Brigham with the Red Heart, Buffalo Bill set out at nightfall for McPherson, where he arrived in safety, and awaiting until it was dark he reached his cabin without being seen.

* Long Hair.

† Buffalo Bill is called by the Indians "White Chief," "Buffalo-Killer," and "Pa-he-has-ka," the latter meaning Long Hair.

and the Indians have another name for him—
‘‘The Death Shot.’’

‘‘I’ve heerd o’ him, and maybe you’ve heerd o’ me, as my pards call me Cast Iron Bill, an’ I’m ther boss o’ the mines, fer I’m a whole team an’ a hoss ter let, an’ a whopper-jawed bulldog under the wagin, leetle gal; don’t I look terreeble?’’

‘‘No, you look like a man with a big heart, but if cornered, I think you would be a very dangerous enemy. Now let me get you some supper, for it is growing late.’’

‘‘I’m yer huckleberry on the eat, leetle gal, though it don’t seem edzactly right in me to destroy all yer pervisions, fer I’m a reg’lar commissary tent for storing away rascals; but I’ll not explain, as you’ll see what I kin do when yer trots out the vittels; but whar’s yer folks, fer yer don’t look like a widdy?’’

‘‘I am all alone; there is not a soul in the world that cares for me,’’ replied Wild Nell, sadly.

‘‘Durned ef I wouldn’t say that thar remark were a—a—falsification o’ ther solid truth, ef yer wer a man, fer yer looks as though everybody in the world might like yer.’’

‘‘Still I tell you the truth; I am all alone, yet I am able to take care of myself.’’

‘‘You looks thar way too, when one don’t get you on ther sly, as that feller did awhile ago; but, tell me, does yer know a young man whom the red-skins call the Buffalo-Killer?’’ and the miner paused in his eating, for Wild Nell had already placed edibles before him, and looked her straight in the face.

‘‘I did know Buffalo Bill, and a braver, better man never lived.’’

‘‘You talks as tho’ he’d passed in his chips, leetle gal?’’

‘‘He was burned to death in his cabin two nights ago—both he and another splendid man.’’

‘‘You don’t tell me so! But, I don’t believe it, fer he hain’t ther man ter go under yit; he’s cut out fer a long life.’’

‘‘Yet I tell you the truth; he returned to his cabin, which was surrounded and set on fire by—by—a band of Indians, it was said, and the door and window being nailed up he was unable to make his escape and perished. Oh, what a terrible death for brave men to die!’’

‘‘You’re right thar, leetle gal; but I don’t believe it, and I want yer ter prove it.’’

‘‘Alas! how can I, and how glad would I be if it were not so.’’

‘‘Waal, trot out the corpse, ef yer wants me to b’lieve it, fer I hain’t one who is givin’ it up ther Scout is dead.’’

‘‘You knew him then?’’

‘‘Yas, I knows him well, an’ he’s a terror; but ef he’s passed in, I’m gwine ter cause several funerals, fer I’m Beelzebub himself on revenge, pious as I look.’’

‘‘And I too intend to revenge him.’’

The words fairly burst from the lips of Wild Nell, and she turned her flashing eyes upon the strange guest.

‘‘Then we’ll hitch hosses on thar, leetle gal; now, who is we to kill fust?’’

‘‘I know his murderer, and I have a bitter grudge against him.’’

‘‘Pint him out, an’ he’ll chaw ther cud o’ discord to on’st.’’

For a moment Wild Nell was silent, and seemed buried in deep thought, while the miner paused in his eating and attentively regarded her.

At length she seemed to have made up her mind to some course, and said:

‘‘You are a brave man, and I believe have a noble soul, so I will join forces with you, and seek revenge against the slayer of Buffalo Bill, and that other, who was also a true man and perished with him.’’

‘‘Whether the Scout has any relative to mourn his loss I know not; but the other was an English nobleman, who came to this country to find out about the death of his brother, a brother who was cruelly murdered here.’’

‘‘In England he left a lordly home and friends, and one who was more than a friend to him, for he was to marry her upon his return, so he told me.’’

‘‘Now he is dead, and she must mourn for him as she did for his brother, and I feel revengeful toward the one who destroyed their happiness, for I too have had the joy of my life crushed, and I too know what it is to suffer.’’

‘‘Once, in the long ago, I wept when I suffered; now I curse, ay, and I hate! Did you ever hate?’’

She asked the question almost savagely.

‘‘Waal, as I’ve got nobody ter love, I has ter hate, an’ I allers hates Injuns I s’pose,’’ was the very quiet reply.

‘‘Well, I hate, and thus hating I will hunt down those who have wronged me; will you aid me, if I will tell you whom it is we are to strike?’’

‘‘Just try me, leetle gal, and ef I don’t, I’ll jno ther Sund’y-school, an’ drink water fer ther remainder o’ my nateral existence.’’

‘‘I’m on ther shoot, I is, an’ I’ve got it bad.’’

‘‘Then bere’s my hand on it, and we’ll not only revenge the Scout and his friend, but wipe out from this border a band of desperadoes that are a curse to it.’’

‘‘And them fellers is—’’

‘‘The Nighthawks of the Prairie.’’

The miner sprung to his feet, and, as he grasped the woman’s hand in a grip that made her wince with pain, he cried:

‘‘That is what brought me here, gal, fer I’m on ther trail o’ ther Nighthawks, wuss nor a wolf, an’ the chief o’ ther band wor ther man I druv from this heur cabing.’’

‘‘Do you know this to be so?’’ asked Wild Nell excitedly.

‘‘I does: it are true as gospel.’’

‘‘Then it is a compact: to-night we start on the trail of the Nighthawks; let them beware of Wild Nell, the Amazon of the West!’’ said the woman fiercely.

‘‘And of Cast Iron Bill,’’ responded the miner in tones of deep and most intense hate.

CHAPTER XXV.

A SCENE IN A GAMBLING-HELL.

THE best gambling-hell, or ‘‘Saloon of Fortune,’’ in Denver, Colorado, was doing a rushing business, to judge from the visitors gathered there, and liberally tempting luck both at the card-table, faro-bank, and busily turning wheel that sent hope or despair at every turn.

Betting at the faro-table was a man from California, and who, as a millionaire ‘‘cattle-king,’’ regarded his losses or winnings indifferently.

He was a man six feet in height, broad-chested, square-shouldered, and dressed in a black silk velvet sack coat, white corduroy pants, stuck in cavalry boots, a ruffled shirt, and a white soft hat, which he pulled down over his forehead, as though the light hurt his eyes.

His face was very much browned by exposure, and clean shaven, and his hair was cut short all over his head, in strange contrast to the long hair around him.

At his side, and when not watching, deliberately stealing ‘‘chips’’ out of the cattle-king’s pocket, and as coolly placing them on the table and betting them, stood a man quite well-known to the reader, for it was none other than the pompous ‘‘Judge’’ Shyster of St. Louis.

He was flashily dressed, held his gold-headed cane under his arm, and watched the playing of the cattle-king with the deepest interest, at the same time depriving him of a portion of his winnings with the skill of a city sneak thief.

At the ‘‘wheel of fortune’’ was a personage, also known to the reader by the name of Moses Moloch, and, in the hope of winning a large sum at a turn he had persistently placed his money upon the ‘‘eagle.’’

Standing near the Jew was his wicked accomplice in crime, Noel Marmaduke, who occasionally bet a small sum, and seemed troubled if he lost at all.

Over in one corner of the saloon, playing a four-hand game of cards at a small table with three others, sat the tall, red-shirted miner, who had so opportunely come to the aid of Wild Nell ten days before, at her cabin, when she was in the power of Royal Keene.

The miner’s hat was drawn down over his eyes, and yet, though interested in his game, he seemed to observe all that was going on in the saloon, and also carefully glanced at every one who entered.

The companions of the miner in the game of cards were Jack Nelson, Beaver Ben, and an old weather-beaten trapper whose face looked like rawhide.

‘‘Curse that eagle bird! I don’t catch him one time, and I ish take my monish off,’’ suddenly cried Moses Moloch, greatly vexed at his losses.

But as he turned to leave the table the spinner suddenly called out in loud tones:

‘‘Eagle wins!’’

‘‘Ahal! I ish put my monish back,’’ cried the Jew, and he sprung back and deposited a pile of gold upon the eagle.

‘‘Too late, sir! I had already called,’’ said the spinner, sternly.

‘‘Well, I ish leave him dere for next time,’’ responded the Jew, sulkily, and again the spinner called out for the winning color, but the eagle had again lost.

‘‘Holy Isaacs! dot eagle bird ish fly too high for me; I ish vill try de pank a leetle while,’’ and the disgusted Jew crossed over to the faro-bank.

‘‘Ah, shudge, you ish happy; how ish it dat you ish always wins?’’

‘‘I’ll tell you, Moses; I always bet on a certainty, you see.’’

‘‘No, I ish don’t see.’’

‘‘Well, I never risk my own money; now behold me!’’ he added, in a low tone, and dexterously he drew several chips out of the cattle-king’s pocket and placed them on the table.

‘‘Oh, yah, I ish see; you ish a great man, shudge; but here ish a nice yoong man.’’

The one to whom the Jew referred had just entered, and indifferently approached the faro-table.

He was under the medium height, dressed in a suit of blue flannel, had short curly hair, and his blonde mustache turned up saucily at the ends.

His hat was set jauntily upon one side of his

head, and altogether he was a rakish, saucy-looking youth.

Drawing a roll of bank-notes from his pocket, he threw down a hundred dollars upon a card and coolly raked in his winnings, while he said in a laughing tone to the Jew:

‘‘Hello! old Israel Oldclothes, how is that for luck?’’

‘‘My yoong frint, you ish not ought to risk your monish dat way; give him to me, and I vill keep him for you and make you von rich man.’’

‘‘Go to the other side of Jordan!’’ was the reckless reply, as the youth threw another roll of bills upon the table.

‘‘Certainly, my dear,’’ and Moses Moloch fell back, for he did not exactly fancy the flash of the youth’s eyes, and he noticed a belt around his waist, and a certain protrusion of the loose coat gave suspicion of a revolver beneath.

Stepping back to his position by the judge, Moses said:

‘‘Dat ish not a nice yoong man, shudge.’’

‘‘No, he’s too fresh, Moses; I dislike freshness in youthful people; but our friend has not come yet.’’

‘‘He ish come now; see!’’

As Moses Moloch spoke there entered the saloon the tall and graceful form of Royal Keene, a smile upon his dark, handsome, yet wicked face, and his eyes glancing searchingly upon every side, as though prepared to meet either friend or foe.

As he entered the youth in blue flannel puffed vigorously at his cigar and retreated from the faro-table to take a seat near the quartette over in the corner, and neither the judge nor Moses Moloch showed any recognition of the newcomer, as he advanced and threw down a fifty-dollar bill upon a number.

As he won, he muttered half aloud:

‘‘My luck is good; I will have hope,’’ and he again placed the bill upon the bank and again won.

‘‘Mine frint, here ish a shentlemans what you ish vill find a pigeon to pick,’’ and Moses Moloch, as he spoke to Royal Keene in a whisper, motioned to the cattle-king, who still played with the utmost indifference, it seemed, as to whether he lost or won, and the judge as skillfully picked his pocket of one out of every five chips he placed in it.

‘‘Señor, this is a dull game; suppose we have a two-handed trial of our luck at cards?’’ said Royal Keene to the cattle-king.

‘‘I am willing, sir; I merely wish to be amused,’’ was the quiet response.

‘‘I’ll amuse you, señor. A pack of cards here, waiter.’’

A negro in attendance brought a fresh pack of cards and placed a small table for the players, while Judge Shyster said, *sotto voce*:

‘‘Moses, you are too fresh; I was enjoying myself immensely with that cattle-king.’’

‘‘Shudge, you ish a fool! Dat man ish not a cattle-keeng, but a detective—’’

‘‘What! Come, Moses, let us at once depart, for I am very tired,’’ cried the judge, in alarm, his red face losing its color.

‘‘No, for he is in safe hants; the dear poy vill say dat de cattle-keeng cheat him, and den he vill shoot him, and all vill pe so pleasant *voce* more.’’

‘‘Ah, I see; but it is not safe to be where firearms are recklessly handled, and—but who the deuce is that?’’

As the judge spoke there strode into the saloon an Indian chief, attired in all the glory of buckskin, feathers and beads.

He stalked quietly forward and took his stand near the faro-table, while Judge Shyster said in a whisper:

‘‘Holy Mephistopheles! it’s an Indian!’’

‘‘He ish look savage—holly Isaacs! look at dat!’’

The Jew had a moment before ordered the negro waiter to bring him a glass of ‘‘rum and molasses,’’ a favorite beverage with him, and as Buttermilk, the servant, passed with the desired drink on a salver, the Indian had, with the most perfect *sang froid*, taken up the glass, dashed the contents down his capacious throat, and then looked with an expression that was truly ‘‘childlike and bland’’ at the surprised Ethiopian, who cried, indignantly:

‘‘Massa Injun, dat drink are for white geman.’’

‘‘It for Injun now,’’ was the laconic response and he turned again to watch the players, while Moses Moloch said to the judge:

‘‘I vill make me some monish out of dat red skeen, shudge.’’

‘‘You’ll get scalped, Moses, I’m a fool if you don’t,’’ was the parting remark of the judge, but, anxious to get a few more dollars, Moses Moloch approached the chief and asked him to join him in a game of cards, after they had had a glass of whisky together.

‘‘Bad whisky make bad Injun; good whisky make good Injun: me good chief: me Red Heart, great Pawnee chief. Sit down; me play poker, seven-up, heap good,’’ and he sat down upon the floor and took out a greasy pack of cards from an obscure recess of his attire, and along with the cards came a roll of greenbacks that made Moses Moloch happy.

At his knock Lord Varian arose and opened the door and greeted him with delight.

"I really began to fear harm had befallen you."

On the contrary, my lord, I met with good luck, and I played the nobleman fine; but I will tell you all about it, and give you my plans for the future, for Royal Keene is again on the border, and is bent on a deeper game of deviltry than ever."

In a few words Buffalo Bill made known the result of his visit to St. Louis, and then the two friends, for such they had now become, sat until late in the night, plotting to circumvent Royal Keene in his plans of villainy.

As at last the Scout and nobleman arose to retire for the night, there suddenly broke in upon the ears of both an ominous threat:

"Buffalo Bill, you are doomed!"

In an instant the two men threw themselves upon the offensive, while a harsh laugh resounded without, and the heavy blows of an ax fell upon the single door and window of the cabin.

"Quick, Lord Varian, guard that window, and I'll look out for the door," cried the Scout, and blowing out the candle the two men stood upon guard, their weapons ready for use.

But the blows from without ceased, and then was heard a dragging sound, a scraping, and a bright light burst up on the outer side.

"By Heaven! they have set fire to the cabin! We must dash out and fight them!" cried Lord Varian.

"Yes, and they have nailed up the door and window so that we cannot get out! It is Royal Keene's work, and he intends to roast us alive."

The Scout spoke with the utmost calmness, and then made an effort to force open the window; it was useless, and he went to the door, and there, too, he failed.

Then the two men looked calmly in each other's faces, while, like mad demons, a gang of wild beings danced around the cabin, throwing more wood against the wooden walls.

Rapidly, and like tinder, the cabin caught on fire, and volumes of flame rolled upward, illuminating the prairie and woods around; but no cry for mercy came from the two men within, only a shot through a crack in the logs, and down went one of the howling devils.

Then another followed, as they rushed to cover, and a second fell and was dragged away, while the cries of warning from the survivors proved that, though dressed as Indians, and hideously painted, they were white men in disguise.

Fiercer and fiercer the fire burned, until, confident that no one within could be alive, the wild band that had made the daring raid upon the Scout's cabin dashed away at the full speed of their horses, just as the alarmed settlers were seen rushing toward the scene, and behind them came a squadron of cavalry from the fort.

But it was too late, as, when in sight of the cabin, the blazing roof and walls fell in with a crash, sending myriads of sparks up into the dark skies.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WILD NELL RECEIVES TWO CALLS.

The second day after the burning of the cabin of Buffalo Bill, Wild Nell sat alone in her home, her brow clouded, as though she was in no agreeable mood.

Nor was she, as things had not gone to suit her of late; she had risked considerable on cards and lost, and the English nobleman, whom she had taken a liking to, after her first meeting with him, was reported burned up in the cabin of Buffalo Bill; then Royal Keene she had not heard from of late, and the Scout himself was away, no one knew where; so Wild Nell was out of sorts.

Presently a shadow fell upon her, and looking up she saw a tall man before her, with long hair and beard, and dressed in an English hunting suit:

"Pardon me, but do I address the fair lady known as Wild Nell, the border Amazon?" he said, politely, stepping across the threshold.

Wild Nell looked searchingly into the face of the man before her, and then said quietly:

"Come in! Others your disguise may deceive, but me, it cannot: I know your devilish eyes too well, Royal Keene."

"Ah! then you do recognize me, fair Nellie?" and closing the door and bolting it, the man threw himself into a chair.

"This accursed hair and beard are as hot as though my head was in an oven," and the man took them off, the act revealing his handsome, yet reckless and sinister face.

"Well, where have you been, may I ask?" and the woman looked at him in a way he did not seem exactly at ease under.

"To St. Louis."

"What deviltry have you been in, there?"

"Getting rich and falling in love."

The woman started, but said, quietly:

"Both of which you doubtless accomplished as you are not particular as to the means you employ in gaining your ends."

"I would have been more successful had it not been for that accursed nobleman."

"How has he been in your way?"

"He followed me East and thwarted my plans, for he made known to my uncle that his old mine was a bonanza, and, in fact, he nearly got my neck in the noose."

"Nonsense, the Englishman has not been away; he spends his days in hunting, and—"

"And will hunt no more, except in the Happy Hunting Grounds," laughed the man, hoarsely.

"So it is said; he was burned up in the Scout's cabin, and I believe you were at the bottom of that fiendish deed."

"I was: it was well done, I think."

"You usually perform your acts of deviltry to perfection; but, why did you say this English noble was in St. Louis, when I know he has been here?"

"I tell you the truth, Nell, and—"

"I tell you that you lie; Buffalo Bill has been absent, and is still away, but Lord Varian—"

"Bah! what a fool I have been; now I see that I was mistaken in the man, and took the Scout, disguised as he was, for Lord Varian; but then I believed that my bullet had put an end to Cody until one of my men told me he was still alive. Well, I am revenged now, for I roasted the Scout and the Englishman together."

In an instant Wild Nell was upon her feet, her eyes blazing:

"Do you mean to say that Buffalo Bill was in that cabin?"

"Yes; we trailed him from the Medicine Creek here, and, peeping through the cracks in the cabin, I saw him within, and so we nailed up the window and door, and roasted those two men like a couple of prairie chickens."

"Royal Keene, I HATE you!"

There was something intensely bitter in the way in which the woman spoke that made the man feel uncomfortable; but, with an indifferent laugh, he retorted:

"So you have often told me before, my dear."

"A drop of water will wear away a stone, and you may yet go too far. I hate you, and I've a mind to kill you," and the woman dropped her hand menacingly upon her revolver.

"Don't do it, Nell; you've a tender heart, and my death at your hands would keep you awake nights. No, instead of shooting me, aid me."

"In deviltry?"

"Of course; why should I be engaged in anything else?"

"What is your next card?" she asked.

"I'll tell you; the old mine panned out rich, as I told you, and I wished to get possession of it by fair means, and failed; then I tried foul, and, through Buffalo Bill, in his disguise, I failed again, just as I was opening my uncle's safe, where papers, deeding me the mine, were kept."

"Now, my uncle comes out West to see about this mine, and with him is an old Jew who is to advance him the money to work the mine, and who, by the way, holds my uncle's notes for all he is worth."

"Along with my uncle comes my beautiful cousin, the only woman I ever loved, Nell."

The woman's eyes were quickly lowered to hide the burning hate that shone in them at his words; but he went on:

"She has a soft place in her heart for me, Nell, and with the old gentleman away, I can win her for my wife."

Again the woman started, and her face became livid: but she made no reply, and Royal Keene, wholly reckless, continued:

"With her my wife, I control her fortune, left by her mother, to her, and the mine, at her father's death will be hers, and out here men often die suddenly; don't they Nell?"

"Yes, they do," was the calm rejoinder.

"Well, my uncle's moneyed man, the Jew, and his legal adviser, a gigantic old fraud by the name of Shyster, with my lovely cousin and a scamp to whom she is engaged, and who is a tool in the hands of old Moses, will comprise the party, and I desire you to aid me in a little plan I have to make a fortune by a bold strike."

"And then?"

"Why, after I marry my cousin, thereby getting her money when she dies, and she cannot live long, as I leave her to your tender mercy, then I will go with you to Europe and we will revel in wealth."

"It is a fiendish plan, and I will not aid you," said the woman calmly.

"But if I say that you must?"

"I will still refuse."

"And you dare to disobey me, woman?"

"I do, most emphatically: I have sinned for you and I am wretched: I am a wild she devil, as men call me, yet I will never aid you again, Royal Keene, in one act of wrong."

The woman was now upon her feet, and she added slowly:

"And if I now killed you, I would save much misery in the world, and you certainly deserve death for your crimes."

"Nell, I command you to take your hand from that pistol!"

He spoke sternly, and threw all the magnetism he possessed into his eyes as he turned them upon the woman.

Often before he had thus controlled her: but now she seemed like stone, and slowly raised the weapon she had drawn from her belt.

He dared not attempt to draw his own revolver, for he knew that it would but hasten his end, as Wild Nell was a dead-center shot, and had a nerve of iron.

He dared not spring toward her, for that would certainly cause her to fire.

Once more he commanded her to place the dangerous toy she held, back in her belt, and with a bitter laugh she refused.

Then he knew that he had lost his remarkable power over her, and that his life hung by a thread.

With a smothered curse he tried another plan, one he hoped would not fail.

Instantly the angry light went out of his eyes, and the harshness from his voice, while he said in tones that caused her to tremble:

"Nell, I bare my heart to your aim. Fire! I will not resist, for I have wronged, bitterly wronged you, and I deserve death at your hands."

"Fire, Nell, and with my dying breath I will forgive you."

The weapon was lowered, and in pleading tones, she cried:

"Oh! Royal, did you mean that you would marry your cousin and cast me off?"

"Why, Nell, you are a silly little fool to think I could desert you," answered the man, his heart bounding with joy at the triumph he now knew he had won.

Into a corner of the room Wild Nell passionately threw the revolver and bounding forward was caught in his arms.

Instantly his face changed, his eyes glittered like a snake's, and his strong arms encircled her like iron bands, while he drew from her belt her own keen knife.

"Oh, Royal! what would you do?" she cried, now thoroughly alarmed at the wild look in his face.

"I will place you where you will never harm me, my beauty. I have long been tired of you, and you have lately shown a disposition to kill me—I will anticipate you."

Holding her firmly, and so that she was unable to move, he raised the knife above her heart, while she fearlessly met his gaze and said, without the quiver of a nerve:

"Coward! murderer! strike! I was a fool, and deserve death at your hands."

"And you shall have it; but I wish first to make you tremble, curse you!" he hissed, his face working with hatred.

"Hold up a leetle, pard! Thet's a gal you has got thar."

From the woman's lips broke a cry of joy; from the man came a muttered curse, as, looking in through the open window he beheld an unkempt head of hair, and dark, rough face pressed against the stock of a rifle, the muzzle of which pointed into the room.

That little tube was aimed straight at the head of Royal Keene, and a finger was upon the trigger.

"Don't shoot! I mean her no harm."

"You've a durned funny way o' amusing the gal then, an' I guesses as how you'd better let up on the funny business and light out, kase this weepin' o' mine wants to explode awful bad. Git, pard, an' don't come round heur ag'in."

The speaker never took his face from the stock of his rifle as he spoke, and Royal Keene quickly threw Wild Nell from him, seized his false wig and beard and bounded from the room, his face demoniacal in its expression.

As the clatter of hoofs was heard, showing that he had ridden away at full speed, the door of the cabin was darkened, and there entered the man who had a moment before saved the life of Wild Nell.

He was evidently a miner from the Colorado diggings, and was dressed rudely in red woolen shirt, corduroy pants, stuck in rawhide boots, and wore a greasy old sombrero on his head.

His hair was unkempt, and so was a short full beard, and his complexion was rough, brown and seamed by exposure. At his back was slung a rifle, and in his belt he wore a couple of revolvers and a bowie-knife.

Stepping into the room he said, in a kindly tone:

"I'm glad I comed, leetle gal, to make yer a visit; I wor jist in time," and he seated himself and looked curiously about him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STRANGE COMPACT.

"I GUESS, sis, as how that man hain't a most particular friend o' yours?"

It was the remark of the stranger, after Wild Nell had thanked him most fervently for saving her life.

"He should be all in all to me, sir, but he hates me as bitterly as I now hate him—no, no, that cannot be, for I would die with exquisite pleasure if I could make him suffer now."

"He are a bad man, to go back on a woman, and I'd served him right ef I had jist sent a bullet through his head; but, I don't like to spile a pleasant job for the hangman, an' I let up on him. I guesses I'll meet him ag'in, some time, and then he'll wan' ter spile my pictur' fer my attentions to him to-day. What are his name, sis?"

"Men on the border call him Royal Keene

and down he sat in front of the chief, whom he readily believed he could cheat out of all of his money.

"My esteemed young friend, perhaps we can indulge in the beauties of the mysterious and entertaining game of poker," and Judge Shyster laid his hand upon the shoulder of the youth whom he had called "too fresh."

The young man glanced hastily around the saloon, and then said, quietly:

"I am willing, for your money is as good to win as that of anybody else," and as the red-shirted miner and his friends arose from the table in the corner, the two sat down there, and a third game was begun, with one of each couple having more than money at stake.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MINER AT BAY.

For a few moments after the three separate games of cards were begun, things went quietly in the saloon, for the whole crowd there seemed intent on playing, or in observing the players, and the clinking of glasses, the rattling of the ivory chips, and the loud voices of the dealers and spinners, and low tones of the betters mingled not inharmoniously together.

Having finished playing, the red-shirted miner, known as Cast Iron Bill, sauntered about the room for awhile, watching the players, until he suddenly stopped near the Indian and Jew, and beheld in the hands of the latter his easy winnings from the red-skin.

"Injun, you is a durned fool to play with the thar Hebrew Jew, for he'll skin you out of every cent you've got."

Red Heart and Moses Moloch both looked up, and the latter's face changed color as he beheld the towering form above him; but he said, respectfully:

"You ish mistaken, my dear: I ish so honest a man as never vas."

"You is a durned liar, and ef yer don't chip back inter thet Injun's paws every cent you've won from him I'll take yer head clean off," and Cast Iron Bill hastily drew out his long knife, while in terror Moses Moloch handed the roll of bills back, and crawled off on his hands and knees out of the way.

The miner laughed as though he enjoyed the fun, and then strolled over to the table where the youth and the judge sat, and the Jew followed slowly, for, having gotten into trouble himself, he was anxious to see the judge follow suit, and he saw the devil of mischief lurking in the eyes of Cast Iron Bill.

Nor was Moses Moloch mistaken in his anticipations, for, after a cursory glance at the two players, a glance which showed him that the judge was winning rapidly, he said, in his deep tones:

"My youthful bantam, that thar old fossil is cheatin' you, I kin sw'ar."

"Sir? what do you mean?" cried the judge, determined to bluff off his accuser and glancing angrily around at him, while he laid one hand down upon the pile of money on the table.

"I means, pard, you'd better drop that dust," and the hand of the miner dropped down on the neck of the judge with a force that made him groan out with pain.

"I'll have satisfaction for this, sir! Yes, I will, sir."

"Ef yer hain't satisfied, I'll oblige you all I kin. Pard, thar is yer money, so you'd better take it, as I intend to chuck this specimen out o' the window."

"Oh! my dear good man, oh!" yelled the judge, and the miner said, sternly:

"You bottle-nosed thief! I seen yer stealin' chips out o' thet cattle-king's pocket, and ef yer don't give 'em up to him I'll set you up an' hev a leetle pistol shootin', with that carmine-colored nose o' yours fer a targit;" and he dragged the judge bodily over to where the cattle-king and Royal Keene were playing cards and betting heavily.

But as he came up behind the Death Shot he suddenly dropped the judge, and grabbed up the pile of money before Royal Keene, at the same time drawing a revolver from his belt.

"What means this outrage?" cried Royal Keene, white with rage, and with his hand on his pistol-butt, as he sprung to his feet.

Instantly the saloon was a scene of wild excitement, for the Death Shot was not unknown there, and the miner looked game, all over.

"It means, pard, that you is an infernal card-skin. I've been watchin' yer leetle game—hold on! I've ther drop on yer, an' my weapon never fails ter ring ther bell—I means ther funeral bell, o' course."

Cast Iron Bill was perfectly cool, and his revolver covered the heart of Royal Keene, whose weapon was yet in his belt.

Around the two stood an eager crowd, on the outskirts of which were the judge, the Jew and Noel Marmaduke, and with fold'd arms, calmly indifferent, was the cattle-king, and yet a close observer could not fail to notice that he was ready for any emergency, be it what it might.

To the remark of the miner Royal Keene instantly retorted:

"The man who says I cheat at cards is a liar."

"Hold on, pard, fer ther man that says I lie has got ter fight."

"Gentlemen! gentlemen! this must not be a common row. A duel! a duel! say I," and the pompous Judge Shyster, with perfect confidence in Royal Keene, if he could get a chance to use his revolver, and anxious to do something in his aid, while he was even more anxious to see the miner suffer, elbowed his way through the crowd, and confronted the two men.

Royal Keene saw that this was a move in his favor, and at once said:

"I am willing; a duel let it be."

That settled it then and there, for neither man, in that crowd, dare back down.

"Good! I will serve Mr.—Mr.—I do not recall your name, sir," said the judge.

"My name is Royal Keene."

"A fine name, sir, and I will act as your second, sir."

"And I is the second of this gentleman."

The voice was low, and the speaker did not thrust himself forward; but it was the youth who spoke, and the miner said in response:

"I'm yer huckleberry, pard; if yer hasn't grit then yer belies yer looks. Let us take our stand, and then let the ball open an' ther worst man go under is my sentiments."

A cheer answered the words of the miner, and calling for silence the judge cried:

"Name your weapons, gentlemen."

"Pistols," said Royal Keene, quickly.

"Shootin'-irons suits me, pard."

"Noble weapons, gentlemen, and just what I should have chosen in an affair of honor."

"Now let us load them for you."

"You durned old fool, didn't I learn yer no sense awhile ago? I guesses I'll hev to become yer tutor ag'in, long as yer is such a idiot as not ter know that a man don't hev to load his shootin'-irons on this yer border, until they has been emptied."

"I beg pardon, sir, but I thought"—began the judge, considerably crestfallen; but the miner interrupted him with:

"Thought nothing: you is a idiot, an' after I shoots this card-sharp I'll throw you out of the window fer bei g born a durned fool."

The judge now heartily regretted having thrust himself forward in the affair, but having done so dared not withdraw, and said mildly:

"Gentlemen, I will now place you in position. Stand here, back to back, and I will give the word to advance. At one you step forward, and at five you wheel and fire."

Then in a low tone he said to Royal Keene:

"Wheel before the word."

"I shall turn at three," was the quiet response, and the two men took their position, back to back.

They were nearly the same size and weight, and it was evident that they were both thoroughly brave.

"I believe there is some trick on hand; look after your man, and I'll keep my eye on that judge," said the youth.

"Have no fear," was the rejoinder of the miner, and with pistols now in hand, and hanging by their side, but cocked, Judge Shyster called out:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

"Ready," was the remark of Royal Keene, while the miner answered:

"All hunky, old Bottlenose."

This raised a laugh from the crowd, which the judge did not relish, and he shouted angrily the first word of the advance:

"One!"

Both men stepped forward, and then the judge continued:

"Two! three!"

Then Royal Keene was seen to turn quickly, but, rapid as he was the miner's movement was more so, for up went his arm, the muzzle of his revolver pointed back over his shoulder and the trigger was drawn back while the weapon was thus pointed, and the report followed.

Down to the floor fell Royal Keene, the blood flowing from a wound on his temple: then a shriek rung through the saloon, and the youth sprung to his side and bent over him, crying in strange accents of pity:

"You have killed him! you have killed him!"

"Yes, yonder mirror saved my life. I saw him turn at the word three," was the calm response.

"Arrest this man for murder, fellow-citizens—arrest this man!" yelled the judge, frantic with rage.

"Yes, one thousand dollars for him," shrieked Moses Moloch, and in the desire for the money offered, a score of men pressed forward.

Instantly the scene changed, for the miner sprung to the front, a revolver in each hand, and at his back were the cattle-king, Jack Nelson and his friends, and Red Heart, all with drawn weapons in their hands.

"Arrest him, men!" shouted the judge from behind the sideboard.

"One thousand dollars I give," shrieked Moses Moloch from under the faro table, and again the crowd pressed forward: but the stentorian tones of the man at bay checked them, as he shouted:

"Back! all of you, or I will kill you as sure as my name is Buffalo Bill."

There were sudden cries of alarm, rushing feet, a jingling of glass, and darkness and silence followed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN ASSASSIN'S REWARD.

WHEN darkness fell upon the scene that ended the foregoing chapter, by the sudden putting out of the lamps by pistol shots, the silence that followed was painful for an instant, and then moving feet were heard, and a loud cry followed:

"He was not killed! He has escaped."

It was the youth who spoke, and as a couple of frightened servants came in with candles from another room they found that the party had thinned out considerably.

Upon the floor, where Royal Keene had fallen, was a small pool of blood, but the man from whose veins it had come, was not to be seen, and a few steps away an open window showed which way he had made his escape.

By the window stood the youth gazing out, and the supposed miner approached, and the mass of short, unkempt hair and beard having been removed, the handsome face of Buffalo Bill was revealed, though it was still disfigured with the brown paint which had given it such a rugged look.

"Nell, I made a mistake, I fear, in making myself known; but I believed I had killed Royal Keene."

"So did I," answered the woman, who in her disguise as a youth none would have recognized; "but, as I bent over him he suddenly shoved me away and bounded out of the window."

"The bullet merely returned the compliment he bestowed on me once; that is, cut the scalp and stunned him."

"I am glad you did not kill him, for I wish my revenge upon him," said Wild Nell, savagely.

"Ah, Nell; in spite of all, you love that man still; you showed it when he fell. Well, we have our work to do over, for he and his comrades have escaped, yet I will still track them down, and the best way is to keep our eyes on the Jew and the judge, for I feel confident, after what I have seen since they came to Denver, that they are in league together."

"I agree with you; but the gamblers are trying to get their rooms to rights again, so let us go," and Wild Nell turned to leave, just as the cattle-king, followed by Red Heart, Jack Nelson and his comrades approached.

"Well, my lord, our disguises have done us no good, for the Prince of Evil has escaped for the time," said Buffalo Bill, addressing Lord Varian, who was wholly unrecognizable without his long whiskers, and with his hair cropped short to his head.

"I fear you were rash, Cody, to risk your life in a duel with that fellow; but I could do nothing."

"I merely intended wounding him, and then forcing a confession from him; but, having to fire as I did, over my shoulder, I could not take time for fancy shooting. But come; let us disperse quietly and meet at the camp of Red Heart, for we must not be seen together if we wish to catch Royal Keene and his band."

One by one the party left the saloon; after which Buffalo Bill gave to the keeper of the saloon generous payment for the losses he had sustained during the row, and then departed, going toward the hotel.

As he passed an unlighted portion of the street a slender form suddenly glided up to his side.

Instantly the Scout's revolver was in hand, but as quickly replaced as a soft voice said:

"Don't kill Star Eye."

"Ah, my little Indian beauty, what are you doing away from your camp?" asked Buffalo Bill, in surprise, at seeing her.

"Star Eye on trail; she knows where Death Shot gone."

"Ah! you are a better trailer than many a chief, Star Eye; but tell me—where is the Death Shot?"

"His camp in mountains; the Death Shot has white braves there; so many," and she counted on her fingers to the number of twelve.

"How do you know this, Star Eye?"

"Me trail him, three suns ago; he gone there now, and Star Eye will show great white chief."

For a moment the Scout was lost in deep thought, and then he said, in a low tone:

"I will go with the Star Eye; let her wait for me in the grove on the river, and I will soon be there."

"Star Eye will wait," was the patient rejoinder, and the Indian girl glided back into the shadow of some trees, while the Scout continued on his way to the hotel.

Entering the hotel office Buffalo Bill became the cynosure of all eyes, as the scene in the saloon was now known all over town, and a busy throng were discussing it as he entered, and Judge Shyster was giving his version of the affair in a loud tone, while Moses Moloch and Noel Marmaduke sat near, and neither of them appeared happy.

The moment that Buffalo Bill entered the o-

Since there was a general hush in the large room and the judge quickly sat down in perfect silence.

The Scout cast his eyes over the crowd in one sweeping glance, and then spoke to the clerk in a low tone:

"Please send this up to room No. 3," and he hastily scribbled a line upon a card.

A servant was called and the card given him, and he soon returned to the door and motioned to the Scout, who followed him in silence from the room, to the great delight of the judge and his two friends.

"Come in!" said a voice within No. 3, as the Scout knocked, and obeying the summons he entered the large and comfortable chamber where sat Mr. Anton Melville and his beautiful daughter Louise.

"Pardon me for calling so late, but I leave Denver to-night and wished to see you a moment before I left," said the Scout to Mr. Melville, yet his glance seemed to love to linger upon the daughter.

"You are welcome, Mr. Cody; but what has been the trouble to-night?"

"In my disguise I went to a gambling saloon, sir, where I had reason to believe that Royal Keene and his band would be, and I was unable to make the capture I anticipated."

"That wicked nephew of mine has only himself to thank if he is taken; but now that we are here, what would you advise me to do regarding the mine?"

"Go there at once; you can hire a stage for yourself and party, for you need take only three or four miners, and when convinced that the mine is worth the outlay you can easily get men and means to work it; but I wish to advise you, sir, not to bind yourself in any way with the Jew, Moses Moloch."

"Ah! do you suspect him of trying to get the best of me?"

"I believe him to be an unmitigated rascal, sir, and also his friend the judge, and though he is willing to advance the money to work the mine, he is evidently up to some deep-laid trick to insnare you, in my opinion, as Judge Shyster was the cause of the escape of Royal Keene to-night, and Moses Moloch offered one thousand dollars for my arrest to-night."

"This certainly looks suspicious, and I will do as you wish in the matter."

"Was Mr. Marmaduke at the gambling saloon also, may I ask, Mr. Cody?" and Louise put the question very quietly.

"He was; but I saw him take no part either in the games or the trouble that followed. Now I must leave you, and rest assured I am working for your good, so go to the mine without fear, as either myself or my companions will be near to aid you if necessary."

"But my daughter insists upon going to the mine also," said Mr. Melville.

"Yes; I do not care to remain here alone," Louise added, promptly.

"There will be no danger, sir, and I think she would enjoy the trip," replied the Scout, and bidding the father and daughter good-night, he left the room and once more descended to the office, where his sudden coming again silenced the judge, and caused the Jew to remark in a low tone:

"Dat ish t' dead man what t' dear boy Royal kill mit a shoot befor he come to St. Louis; I don't like some dead mans like dat. Shudge, I t'inks you ish better keep quiet."

"I'm still as a mouse, Moses, still as a mouse," replied the judge, as the Scout cast his eye again over the crowd and then walked out into the street.

"I thought he was going to his room; but if I had known he was going into the street again I'd have laid for him and put a bullet through his heart, for they don't mind your killing a man here," said Noel Marmaduke, courageously; but hardly were the words out of his mouth before there came two pistol-shots in rapid succession, followed by running feet, and the next instant a man staggered into the room and fell his full length upon the floor.

Every man started to his feet as behind him came Buffalo Bill, a revolver in his hand.

"He fired at me from the corner of the hotel, and I returned the shot," and the Scout bent over the fallen man and ad-ded:

"He is dead! See that he is decently buried, Hotchkiss."

"He don't deserve burial, Bill; that is Half-Breed Nick, one of the Nighthawks," said Ned Hotchkiss, the hotel clerk.

"Still he is a human being and must be buried; I'll pay for it," and Buffalo Bill again left the hotel, while Moses Moloch remarked facetiously to Noel Marmaduke:

"He ish gone out in de street again, my dear."

"Yes, and he may stay there; by Jove, what did I not escape!"

"Moses, I'm going to bed; it is late and I do not feel well," said Judge Shyster, solemnly, and the legal luminary hastily departed for the bar-room, followed by his two friends, who swallowed a "brandy straight" and sought their rooms, deeply impressed with the scenes of the night, and, in spite of the golden reward

they hoped to reap by coming to the wild West, wishing themselves safely back in St. Louis.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN THE NIGHTHAWKS' DEN.

TRUE to his word, Buffalo Bill, after leaving the hotel, went to join Star Eye, the Pawnee maiden. She stepped out of the dark shadows of the trees as she saw him approaching, and recognized his tall form, and said, simply:

"Come."

Without a word he followed her. Leaving the city behind them the Indian girl turned into a narrow canon and proceeded along it at a rapid pace, the path gradually leading them up into the hills.

In perfect confidence the Scout followed his dusky guide until she halted in a cedar thicket growing upon the very verge of a precipice.

"Bad pale-face men have camp down there," said Star Eye, pointing down into the dark ravine.

"But how do they get down there, Star Eye?" asked the Scout.

Without answering the girl searched for an instant and then raised from a crevice in the rocks what appeared to be a coil of rope; but after taking it in his hands the Scout said, quickly:

"A rope-ladder, as I'm a sinner."

"Yes, go down easy; it tied to tree."

"You are right; one end is fast to a tree, and down I will go."

"The Buffalo-killer is thankful to the Star Eye: she is a good trailer, and the chiefs of her people shall know that she has the courage of a great brave; will the Star Eye return to her camp now?"

"No, Star Eye wait here; white chief might have trouble, for bad pale-face down there."

Buffalo Bill was touched by the devotion of the Indian girl, but made no reply, and letting the rope-ladder fall over the precipice, he swung himself upon it, and saying he would soon return began the descent.

The Indian girl watched him until he disappeared in the darkness below, and then she sat down to patiently await his return.

For some time she waited without a single motion of impatience, and then there came to her ears the sound of voices.

Instantly she darted into the shadow of the cedars, and a moment after two men approached and halted near her.

"Pard, whar is ther descender?" asked one, little dreaming that other ears overheard him than those his remark was intended for.

"It are ag'in' ther holler cedar; no, it's here aneath my feet; who in thunder's been so careless as to let it hang?"

"One o' ther lads who is as lazy as a Gov'ment mule and don't keer to walk round ther head o' ther valley, I guesses; but, bounce over, fer we has ter be back at Denver shortly arter day-break, ther capt'in said."

Much sooner than Star Eye had anticipated, the two men went over the precipice, and left her in a tremor of dread.

At first the brave girl almost sprung upon them single-handed; but, checking herself, she waited until they disappeared in the darkness below, and then she seized a heavy rock to hurl it upon them, but again hesitated, for she feared she might also hit the Scout with the same descending missile.

In doubt and fear she lay down upon the ground and waited for developments, now thoroughly sorry that she had told Buffalo Bill where the Nighthawks had their mountain haunt.

In the meantime the fearless Scout had descended the rope-ladder for the distance of a hundred feet, where he came to a ledge of rock and rested.

Then he reconnoitered and saw still below him, off to the right, up the canon, a glimmer of light, and feeling convinced that a path led the rest of the way down the steep hillside, he cautiously searched for it, and was soon rewarded by finding the rugged descent.

Down this he felt his way and was soon in a position that overlooked a deep ravine, in the bottom of which were seated half a dozen men around a fire, by which they were cooking a midnight supper, for the savory odor arose to his nostrils.

The ravine seemed to run back under the rocky hill, forming a cavern, and here the Scout knew was the secret den of the Nighthawks. He congratulated himself upon the discovery he had made through the prairie-craft of the Star Eye.

"So far, good; to-morrow night I will strike them here," he muttered, and, satisfied with his discoveries, he retraced his way up the steep path and soon put his foot upon the rope-ladder.

Then he started, for it vibrated violently, and he knew that some one was coming down.

It might be the Star Eye coming to look for him, and it might be a foe.

In case it was the former all would be well, but if the latter, trouble must follow then and there.

Looking about him he in vain sought a hiding-place; nowhere could he find a retreat, and if he went down into the ravine, he must face half a dozen foes and perhaps more.

Like lightning the thoughts flashed through his mind, and then he determined to meet the result there, be it what it might.

A moment more and a form was before him slowly descending, and his piercing eyes descried another only a few feet above, and he knew that the moment of a struggle was at hand.

It was only a narrow shelf he stood upon, and two men in a death fight could not stand there, so he acted promptly, and as the man touched his foot on the rock the long-bladed knife, driven with terrible force, sunk into his back.

There was a wild cry, and in spite of an effort to catch him and prevent his fall, the wounded man leaped into the air and fell with a sickening, crashing sound into the ravine, while startled voices from the Nighthawks below were heard.

Then Buffalo Bill turned to grapple with his next foe; but that wary fellow had instantly understood that all was not right, and had disappeared.

But where?

The ladder swung lightly to and fro under the grasp of the Scout, and it was evident that there was no one upon it.

"By Heaven! did he, too, fall below? No, it could not be that he passed me in downward flight and I not notice him; and yet it must have been so," he said, half aloud; and, convinced that he must ascend the rope and escape, as the alarmed Nighthawks were heard coming rapidly up the steep path, he seized the ladder, replaced his revolver in his belt, and began to climb with alacrity.

But hardly had he gone a dozen rounds, when he felt something press hard against his heart, and a stern voice cried:

"Pard, I has yer dead; ef yer moves, I'll pull trigger."

The Scout's hands held the rope, his feet were on other rounds, his pistols in his belt, and he knew that he was wholly in the power of the speaker, whose weapon pressed his heart hard.

Too late he knew that the second man had not fallen, as he had believed and hoped, but had slipped off on some narrow shelf of rock known to him, and thus held full advantage.

"Is yer goin' ter surrender, or will yer take a tumble? Thar bain't no featherbeds below, so speak up quick," said the man, chuckling with delight at the clever ruse he had played.

"I surrender," sullenly replied the Scout, and instantly his captor called out:

"This way, pard, fer I has ther varmint an' no mistake."

The next moment half a dozen men stood at the foot of the rope-ladder, and their revolvers covered the Scout, while one of their number, at the command of their comrade on the shelf above, crawled up to take the weapons of the prisoner out of his belt.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

THE man who ascended the rope-ladder to remove the weapons from the belt of the Scout did it most skillfully, and then the three descended to the shelf, when all went down into the ravine, except one who was to go to the cliff above and reconnoiter.

Silently Buffalo Bill followed his captors, his thoughts in no ways agreeable company, for he knew well that his situation was a desperate one; but so often had he been in deadly danger before, and so often had he managed to escape, that he did not give up all hope.

Leading their prisoner up to where the fire-light fell full upon him the Nighthawks started as one of them sung out:

"Great God! boys, it's Buffalo Bill we've got here."

All crowded around him, and several faces he readily recognized as men who had been in the "dug-out" when he had escaped at the time of his going East.

"Yes, I am Buffalo Bill; what then?" he asked, indifferently.

"A good deal, as you'll see; yes, I knows yer now, although I didn't when I seen yer at the saloon to-night, and you chipped in so clever on the captain," said one of the men, who had been at the gambling-hell disguised as a cattle drover.

"So Royal Keene is your captain, is he? I thought as much."

"Who said so?" gruffly responded the man.

"You as much as admitted it just now; is your captain here now?"

"Well, you has ther cheek o' a Gov'ment mule. When you is a prisoler to be a catechizing us: it's for me to ask you questions, an' I'm goin' ter do it, an' yer better tell ther truth."

"Because you are a set of liars do you think all men must be?"

"Look a-heur, pard, you is too fresh to keep; but I won't quarrel with yer, seein' as how yer is likely to attend a funeral an' git a free ride in ther front vehicle yerself, but, jist tell me how yer come to nose out our place here."

"Trailed you; how else!"

"Wal, what pards has yer with yer?"

"No man came with me," answered the Scout, but he didn't add that a most dangerous woman did, and doubtless knew all about his capture and would not see him die, if in her power to prevent it.

"You is sartin no sneakin' man come with yer?"

"I think I should know."

"Wal, that is good; but what brought yer here?"

"The desire of tracking your band to death, but more particularly your chief," fearlessly responded the Scout.

"Yer don't seem ter love us much; wal, you've missed it."

"So it seems."

"Yas, an' yer havo come ter our camp, an' yer have kilt one o' our pards, an' yer escaped from us once afore an' committed murder, an' yer have— Oh, gosh darn it, yer is so wicked thar's no use recitin' yer crimes over, as yer'll 'ave the nightmare sartin."

"Well, what do you intend to do with me?"

"Kill yer, durned ef we don't."

"When?"

"Yer is mighty cur'ous, but it's kind o' natural, I guesses, so I don't mind tellin' yer. We'll kilt yer when ther captain comes, 'ka'se he'd be awful mad ef we hed the fun while he was away."

"Doubtless; now let me go to rest."

"Oh, hokey! You is a cool one! Here we is like a cor'ner's jury sittin' on yer dead body, an' ther proceedin' don't int'rest yer a durned bit, an' yer gits sleepy; 'pears to me you'll git sleep enough afore long, and yer won't wake up till Gabriel toots his bugle for roll-call; but, I'll not be hard on yer, so, boys, jist toss him a blanket thar by ther rock, an' when he's tied up tight we'll turn in, too; but we must sleep with one eye open, 'ka'se this here pris'ner are Buffalo Bill, ther King o' Buckskins, an' he bev got more lives than a Maltese cat, I've hearn tell."

In a few moments the Scout was securely bound hands and feet, with a stout rope; a blanket was thrown upon the rock for him, and be laid down upon his face and seemed soon fast asleep.

Then one by one his captors, who had been drinking deep, threw themselves down to rest, and their snoring soon demonstrated that they also had sunk into the arms of Morpheus.

Presently, as the fire burned low, an object touched the Scout on the head, and looking up he saw by the side of his face a knife.

It was tied to the end of a rope, and had evidently been lowered from above.

But already were the hands of the brave man free, as, lying upon his face, he had his wrists drawn up to his mouth, and his sharp teeth had been gnawing the rope for the past hour.

But he seized the rope, unfastened the knife, and the next instant his feet were freed carefully and noiselessly.

Then he drew hard on the rope and found it firm, and knew that by that means alone he must escape.

Around him, and not five feet away, were his captors, and by the side of one of them lay his own belt of arms.

These he must have, and though it was a terrible risk to run he stretched forth his hand and dragged them toward him.

The sound, slight as it was, aroused one of the men near, who raised his head and glanced about him, and then his eyes fell upon the prisoner; but Buffalo Bill already lay in the same position once more, and the Nighthawk returned to the comfort of his nap.

Convinced now that all were asleep, the Scout drew himself up by the rope, until he stood on his feet.

Then he nerved himself for the ascent, a very difficult task, as the rope was not very large; but he was a powerful man, with a grip of iron, and was soon going up, hand over hand, and safely reached the shelf of rock, forty feet above, and from which it had been lowered.

There, holding one end of the rope, while it was twisted around a large rock, stood Star Eye, the Pawnee maiden, who said simply, as the Scout reached the rock by her side:

"Me glad; pale-faco chief much brave."

"You are the brave one, Star Eye; but come, let us get out of this," said the Scout, and he leaned over to draw up the rope after him, when the end of it, still swinging about in the ravine, struck one of the renegades below in the face.

Instantly he seized the rope, gave it a pull, glanced around for the prisoner, and his startled cry brought every sleeper upon his feet:

"Boys, Buffalo Bill has escaped."

Wrenching the rope loose from the hand of the Nighthawk, and with a force that drew him half off his feet, Buffalo Bill hastily dragged it up and turned to the Star Eye, who said, simply:

"Come!"

Rapidly he followed her along the narrow ledge of rock, until they came to a ravine that led up into the forest above, and soon they were bounding through the cedars, while wild

cries resounded behind them, as the now thoroughly alarmed Nighthawks started in pursuit.

But the Star Eye was as fleet on foot as a deer, and easily kept alongside of the Scout, who held her hand to aid her, and after a long, hard run the lights of the town came in sight, just as the eastern sky grew gray with the approach of dawn.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE RED MASKS.

THE second day after the duel in the gambling-saloon, a stage-coach was rumbling over an uneven road, leading to the Valley Mine, so long believed to be worthless, by its owner, Anton Melville.

Upon the box sat the driver, a bluff, good-natured borderman, who had driven stage in the Rocky Mountains for years, and who was known as Rocky Tom, and in his way was a character.

In his belt were two revolvers and a knife for use, should they become necessary, but he was always the best judge as to the time and place when deadly weapons should be made use of, and he remarked to his companion, during a conversation, upon the terrors of a life on the frontier:

"A man is a durned fool to draw a weapon when he hasn't got everything to his own likin'; ef it is shoot clean through, every man for himself, and ther devil take ther him'most, I'm thar; but ef ther odds is ag'in' me, I pass, you bet, pard."

His companion on the box was somewhat gaudily dressed for staging it on the border; but then, Noel Marmaduke, for he it was, always wished to impress every one with his wealth and importance.

And he, too, wore a belt of arms, and gazed at the weapons frequently with admiration.

"I tell yer, pard, yer had better keep them irons out o' sight; don't draw until yer has ter kill, mind me on that," said Rocky Tom, as Noel Marmaduke drew a revolver and glanced affectionately at it for the twentieth time during the journey.

"This looks like a dismal place we are approaching, and I wish to be ready, should we be attacked," said the young man, bravely.

"It are a dismal place, and it are called Dead Man's Hollow, for many are ther fellers that has passed in thar chips right yonder in ther good old days when ther mines war running well; and, oh Lordy, the dust as ust ter be snaked in here are a caution; but, bless yer, pard, ther hain't no travel ter speak of over this trail now, an' ther road-agents don't hang round whar they kin git nothin'— Hello, thar, Gray Eagle! what are yer prickin' up them ears fer?" and Rocky Tom glanced at his leader, who certainly showed signs of uneasiness, as the stage rolled down into the creek bottom.

"As I live thar are somebody around. Now hold on, an' don't be a cussed idiot," and Rocky Tom thrust his hard hand down upon the arm of his companion, who, with pale face, was about to draw a revolver.

"Halt! Throw up your hands!"

The command rung out stern and clear, but the speaker was not in sight, and Rocky Tom at once clapped his foot upon the "brakes," and obeyed the order, while up went his hands above his head.

But not so with Noel Marmaduke, for, demoralized with terror, he drew out his revolver and began to fire at random.

Down went Rocky Tom into the "boot," while he cried:

"You Gosh-darned fool, you'll—"

But several shots drowned his words, and with a wild shriek Noel Marmaduke sprung from the stage-box to fall dead upon the ground.

"Do you surrender, or shall I riddle the stage?"

The question came in the clear stern tones of the man who had first spoken, and instantly Rocky Tom called out:

"Hands up, pard! we're innocent lambs, and don't mean shoot; thar cuss was a durned fool."

Instantly a dozen men appeared in sight, coming from the rear of the stage, upon either side, and in front, and all of them held rifles which were leveled at the driver and stage windows.

They were a rough-looking band, heavily armed, and their faces were securely hidden beneath red masks.

Their leader, and who was much better dressed than his followers, approached the stage door, and with pistol in hand, said sternly:

"Come forth all!"

But no response came from within, and he repeated his order; but still none within obeyed.

"Ready, men! If my third command is not heeded, riddle that old hearse with bullets!"

Instantly the stage door was thrown wide open, and out bounded nimbly none other than Judge Shyster, his face livid, and his hands trembling.

One horrified glance he cast at the dead body of Noel Marmaduke, and then turned his eyes upon the masked man in front of him.

Behind him followed Anton Melville, also

pale, but calm, and turning, he aided his daughter to alight.

Louise also looked with a shudder upon the man to whom she had been engaged, but her look was one of pity for his fate, and not sorrow such as would be felt for one she loved.

"Is there no one else in that stage?" cried the leader of the Red Masks.

A scuffling sound followed, and a faint voice answered:

"Yes, my dear; only me."

Then the frightened face and trembling form of Moses Moloch appeared, and he took his stand by the side of the judge.

"And who are you, sir?" asked the road-agent, sternly.

"I am nobody, my dear," was the plaintive reply, and the chief continued:

"I wish to know which of you three men answers to the name of Anton Melville!"

He glanced searchingly over the three, and then said, as silence followed, and stepping toward Judge Shyster:

"You are Anton Melville, sir?"

"I'm a pig's brother if I am; if I was, sir, I'd own it, for he's rich and I am poor."

"Then who are you, sir?"

"I am Judge Chineapin Shyster, a luminary and pleader at the bar—"

"Your nose shows you to be a pleader at the tavern bar," said the leader.

"Demme, sir, do you intend to insult me, sir?" screamed the judge.

"Yes, if it is possible to do so," was the threatening reply, and, dropping his pompous tone, the judge answered:

"All right, sir."

"Again I ask, which of you is Anton Melville, the St. Louis millionaire?"

"My name is Melville, sir," and Anton Melville faced the leader of the Red Masks.

"Ah; then you are the one I seek."

"Glory be to Abraham," ejaculated the Jew, while Judge Shyster at once straightened up again into pomposity.

"You are the owner of the Valley Mine, some miles distant from here, I believe?" said the masked outlaw.

"I am, sir."

"The man you employed to work it, has lately struck it rich, and you are now going to see what the prospects are of making it pan out a fortune for you?"

"You are correctly informed, sir."

"Well, Mr. Melville, you must part with that mine; you must sell it to me, here, this legal luminary drawing up the papers, and for it I will pay you the sum of one thousand dollars cash, which amount you offered it for a few months ago."

"Never, sir, for if I part with it I am a ruined man, as yonder Jew holds my paper covering all I am worth."

"And how did you expect to work the mine, may I ask?"

"Mr. Moloch, there, was to advance me the money."

"Ab, yes; and to take it out of the fortune of your son-in-law that was to be, and whose little game of life I trumped," and the leader pointed contemptuously to the dead body of Noel Marmaduke.

"Mr. Marmaduke was my security, sir."

"Yes, and he was not worth a dollar, excepting what his master, the Jew, gave him, and—"

"He ish was a nice young—"

"Shut up, Jew; I tell you, Anton Melville, you have been grossly deceived; that dead body was, in life, an escaped convict—"

"Oh, Heaven, I thank Thee!" burst from the lips of Louise Melville.

"I tell you the truth; Marmaduke was not his name, and he was a felon whom this Jew—"

"My dear," began the Jew.

"Shut up, I tell you."

"Yes, my dear," and Moses, in a tremor, looked at the judge, who now began to fear his time might yet come.

"To get your wealth the Jew led you into speculations, and he succeeded; but, not satisfied, he wanted the property coming to your daughter from inheritance, and he made a tool of Noel Marmaduke, and set him at work to marry Miss Melville, for Moses Moloch is revengeful, and could never forgive you, or your daughter, for refusing the honor of an alliance with him."

"My dear, you ish—"

"Hold your tongue, sir. Now, Anton Melville, you see from what I have saved your daughter from becoming: the wife of an escaped convict!"

"And, robber though you be, I thank you from my inmost heart," cried Louise.

"Gratitude is of slight use, Miss Melville, for I wish something more substantial: the Valley Mine."

"And I tell you, that it is all I have in the world," groaned Mr. Melville.

"No, for I will restore you the notes held by this Jew. Moses Moloch, hand me those notes!"

"Mine frident, I ish not got t'e notes."

"You lie in your false throat; here, men, riddle that old Jew, if he does not obey me."

The Red Masks at once leveled their rifles upon the Jew, who sunk upon his knees with ter-

ror, while Judge Shyster, with one bound, placed himself ten feet distant, and out of immediate range.

"Now, sir, hand me those notes, for you are rich enough not to miss what they would have brought you."

With muttering and trembling the Jew took a large leather wallet from his pocket, and having fumbled over the papers within handed one to the chief.

"This is but one; there are four more," was the cool reply.

"You ish know too much about it, mine fri'nt."

"I know all about it; hand me those other four notes, for those men are anxious to kill you."

Instantly the other notes were handed over, and the expression upon the Jew's face was pitiable indeed.

Placing them carefully in his pocket, the leader then turned to the judge and said:

"I have here pen, ink and paper, so draw up paper, transferring the Valley Mine to me."

The judge went to work in a businesslike manner, anxious to curry favor with his captor, and asked, briskly:

"Your name, sir?"

"John Smith."

"Ah, I've heard the name before. John Smith, party of the second part—ahem," and the document was soon written out and handed to the chief who glanced it over rapidly, and then said:

"Mr. Melville, in this purse are one thousand dollars; now please sign this document."

"Never, sir!" was the firm reply.

"Then your life shall be the forfeit," was the decided response.

"Oh, Louise, what shall I do?" groaned the unhappy man.

"The body of yonder man, father, proves that these men will not hesitate at any crime, and I will soon inherit my fortune, which will be ample for both of us; sign it, and save your life," said the plucky girl.

Anton Melville took the pen in his hand, and bent over the paper; but as he did so, there rattled forth a half-dozen shots, wild yells followed, and the next instant up dashed Wild Nell on her spotted mustang, followed by Star Eye, Red Heart and a dozen warriors.

Two of the Red Masks fell at the fire, the Jew yelled for mercy, and Judge Shyster ran under the stage-coach, bending his pompous form with considerable alacrity.

Then followed a scene of wild confusion, answering volleys from the Red Masks, a stern order, a wild shriek for aid, and the next instant the daring robber leader bounded into the bushes, bearing in his arms the form of Louise Melville.

"My daughter, my child! save her, oh, save her!" cried the almost broken-hearted father, and Wild Nell and Red Heart dashed in pursuit; but the leader of the Red Masks was already mounted, and away sped his swift horse, with Louise lying unconscious in the arms of the daring rider, while his men followed behind, firing upon their pursuers as they fled.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE JUDGE AND THE JEW IN TROUBLE.

The scene that followed the flight of the Red Masks, who were none other than the renegade band of Nighthawks, beggars description, for the poor father sunk down upon a rock, utterly overcome by the capture of his daughter, and the Jew danced about frantic with rage at the loss of his notes, while Judge Shyster with nothing to lose but his life, seemed indifferent for the sorrow and fury of his two companions, and swelled up with dignity once more now that he felt that he was in no danger.

Wild Nell and Star Eye had gone on after the Red Masks, and Rocky Tom sat upon his box with the philosophical air of an old stager, waiting for new developments.

He had been chartered for the trip to the mine and back, had his pay safe in Denver, and was indifferent as to what turn affairs took, though he felt very sorry at the capture of Louise, but little regret for the death of Noel Marmaduke, whom he mentally cursed as a "durned fool."

Presently Wild Nell returned, having relinquished the chase of the robbers to Red Heart and his braves.

With the deepest sympathy in her manner she approached Mr. Melville and said:

"Do not despair, sir, for old Red Heart is a skillful trailer and will track the Hawks to their den, and they dare not injure your daughter."

"That man dare do anything, I fear."

"Do you know him, then?" asked Wild Nell, in surprise.

"I believe I recognized him as one who I feel is anxious to harm me and mine, and I fear that poor Louise is lost."

"No, no; you must have courage, for the Star Eye has gone after one who will track the Nighthawks to the end of the earth; she knows where to find him, for she parted with him only this morning."

"And to whom do you refer?"

"To Buffalo Bill, a man known on the border as the King of Buckskins."

"Yes, he may save her; but where is he?" asked Mr. Melville, with hope.

"The Star Eye tells me that the Scout was captured by the Nighthawks, but managed to escape and has gone to the vicinity of the Valley Mine, and the Star Eye went to seek him, while I came back to tell you to go on there at once."

"But how came you to come to our aid?" asked Mr. Melville, gazing with admiration upon the fearless girl, who was once more attired in her handsome border costume.

"The Scout asked the Star Eye to have her father and his braves follow the stage-coach from Denver, and as I was trailing it I came upon the Indians, who were upon the same duty."

"You are a brave girl, and worthy a far better life than the one you lead here, and you shall never want for a home, my child, if you will only aid in restoring my daughter to my arms."

"I thank you, sir; but we must be pressing on toward the mine."

"But those dead men?" and Mr. Melville humanely pointed to the bodies of Noel Marmaduke and the two Nighthawks, who had fallen in the charge of the Indians upon them.

"Bah! they do not deserve burial; but, to please you, Rocky Tom will throw them inside the coach and you can ride on the box with him."

"And me, my dear?" asked Moses Moloch, who had been, with the judge, attentively listening to all that had passed between Mr. Melville and Wild Nell.

"You! Why, you and that old beat with you shall hoof it back to Denver," was the angry retort.

"Mine gracious gootness! Why, my dear—"

"Don't dear me, Jew, for I'm in no pleasant humor, and my revolver is conveniently near my hand, when I talk to such as you."

"Miss—Miss—ahem! my dear young lady, this gentleman and myself are citizens of this great country, and—"

"Hold your tongue! you are a precious pair of thieves, and I know you came West only to swindle this old man, so back you go to Denver on foot, and if you are there when I return I'll call out the Vigilantes to give you a taste of border justice; now begone!"

"I am a poor leetle man, mish—" began the Jew.

"Yes, a poor leetle man with a leetle soul; but I have warned you to take the back trail, and if you don't do it within the minute, I'll use you as targets for pistol practice, and Wild Nell never misses a mark."

She drew her revolver threateningly, while the two men bounded away up the road they had come, and Rocky Tom made the woods and cañons ring with his shouts of boisterous laughter.

"Nell, oh, Nell, ther Jew's a-leadin' now, but I'm durned ef I don't b'lieve ther judge will come in on the home stretch, ahead," cried Rocky Tom, from his perch on the box, and even Mr. Melville smiled at the two men running up the hill, and whom, to hasten on their way, Wild Nell sent a few shots over their heads.

With yells of terror they increased their speed, the judge putting on an extra spurt that brought him alongside of the Jew, and together they disappeared over the rocky crest of the hill.

Dismounting from his box, yet still laughing, Rocky Tom threw the three bodies into the stage, Mr. Melville mounted upon the driver's seat, and with one spring Wild Nell was on the back of her spirited spotted mustang.

The next instant Rocky Tom cracked his whip with a loud report, which doubtless reached the ears of the Jew and the judge, accelerating their pace, and away dashed the four stage-horses, with Wild Nell galloping along in the lead.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CAVE IN THE CAÑON.

WHEN the leader of the Red Masks dashed away with Louise Melville in his arms, he held her with seemingly slight effort, while his trained steed bounded along at a pace that defied pursuit, notwithstanding his double burden.

Behind their leader, in a solid mass, came his band. They fired, as they fled, at their Indian pursuers, who did not press them close, well-knowing their deadly aim.

After a chase of several miles the chief turned into a narrow cleft between two high hills, or rocks, and here he halted, and said, sternly:

"Hold this position, Devil Dick, and throw out scouts on either side; if they press you, show no mercy to white or red face, to man or woman; I am going on to the cave."

"All right, capt'in; we'll hold on here ag'in' a regiment, you kin bet," answered the burly ruffian, whom his leader had called Devil Dick, a name which the cruelties of the man had certainly won for him.

As if no longer dreading pursuit, the chief again rode on, his horse picking his way along,

and evidently following a path familiar to him. So far Louise had shown but one sign of consciousness, and that was when her eyes slowly opened for a moment, glanced upon the red masked face, and then closed again.

At length the steed halted in front of a large cavern running back into the face of a hill that towered several hundred feet above, and a low call from the lips of the leader brought to the entrance a red-whiskered, red-haired man, with most forbidding countenance.

"A petticoat instid o' gold-dust," said the new-comer, as he caught sight of Louise held in the arms of his chief.

"It is none of your business, Hutchins, what I bring here," sternly answered the chief.

"Beg parding, capt'in; I hain't a bit cur'us, I isn't."

"Take this girl, while I dismount."

But instantly Louise gave a spring and reached the ground, while she cried:

"No, don't touch me."

"Aha, you were only shamming, were you? But, never mind; come with me, and you need have no fear; nay, do not shrink from me, for I mean you no harm."

"Do not touch me and I will go with you, for I am in your power, and must obey you; but why did you bring me here?"

"You shall hear all soon. Come with me, please," said the chief, in a tone of kindness that was in strange contrast with his stern manner a moment before.

"I am ready; lead on!" haughtily answered Louise, and telling the man, Hutchins, to look after his horse, the leader bade the maiden follow him into the cavern.

Seeing that it was not wholly dark Louise obeyed, and a walk of thirty paces brought them out into daylight once more.

Here the maiden discovered a natural bowl, surrounded by high hills, or rather precipices, for the sides were unbroken and the summit were barren of verdure.

But the bowl was fertile, for trees dotted its surface and a small rivulet glided through the center.

Upon the banks of this stream were three or four rudely-built huts, and there were several rude-looking men playing cards in front of one of them.

Leading the maiden to the furthest of these cabins, the chief halted and threw open the door, while he said, quietly:

"This is your home, until you are willing to leave it for a better one."

With a despair at her heart Louise sunk down upon a bench, and, leaning her arms upon a roughly-made table, burst into tears, for she realized that she was wholly in the power of a reckless, desperate man, who had brought her to his secret retreat.

"Oh, why have you brought me here?" she groaned, in anguish.

"Have no fear; you are with one who loves you."

The voice seemed strange, and looking quickly up she saw that the red mask had been removed, and then there burst from her lips a startled cry, as she sprung to her feet.

"Roy, my poor lost cousin! How base indeed have you become!"

"Stay, Louise, and hear me, for I again repeat that I mean you no harm," said the man known as Royal Keene, earnestly.

"Your actions, sir, speak far more truthfully than your words," was the sarcastic retort.

"Nay, hear me; I sought you in St. Louis to—"

"Rob my old father, your uncle."

"No, I did no such thing; but appearances are against me, I admit."

"Decidedly."

"You are severe, Louise, for I went to St. Louis to win your love, and hoped that, although I had been a little wild—"

"A mild way of putting murder, forgery and—"

"I tell you I am not guilty of what you accuse me; of taking life, yes; but I risked death on the gallows to—"

"To rob a man who had saved you from the gallows," was said in a tone of intense bitterness by the maiden.

"You are wholly unreasonable, Louise," answered the man, still holding his temper.

"I went to tell you that I loved you, and ask you to become my wife."

"I do not doubt the latter for an instant, Roy, for you knew that I would soon come in possession of a fortune in my own name."

"It was not your fortune I cared for, but your love, Louise, and what I have now done is in hopes of winning it."

"Hal hal a strange method indeed."

"Yet, such was my motive, for I took from that Jew the notes he held against your father, and here I now place them in your hands."

He held them forth and she instantly took them, saying quietly:

"I will keep them, and in good time restore them to their owner, the Jew, for my father is not so dishonorable as to defraud a man out of money he loaned him, although the loan may have been given to ruin him; you have again overshot the mark, cousin mine."

"Do not be foolish, Louise," and the man lit his pipe with vexation.

"I am sensible; now what else have you to say for yourself?"

"I knew that there was a plot to marry you to that ex-convict, and I killed him to prevent the sacrifice."

"Roy, as base as was that man, and I really believe he was all that you say he is, I would have rather married him than that he should have been foully murdered to save me from him," said the noble girl.

"Well, I did it to save you, as I made the Jew give up the notes to save your father from ruin; nay, more, finding out that there was a plot against my uncle to cheat him out of the mine, I intended forcing him to sell it to me, and then to give back to you the deeds."

"You have a most remarkable way of acting to serve one, Roy; you commit murder to serve me, rob the Jew to save my father, and force him to sell a mine, or would have done so, to prevent his being defrauded out of it; and more, you appear as a common highwayman, leading on a dozen cutthroats, and ask me to love you, after your conduct years ago in St. Louis, and your attempted burglary at midnight, and which would have been successful, had it not been for a noble man, who thwarted your plans. No, I despise, I hate you, even though kindred blood flows in our veins."

The maiden spoke warmly, and then the devil in the man broke out in fury, for he was unable longer to control himself.

"Louise Melville, I have sought your love and you have treated my pleadings with contempt; now I shall make you know that I am not one to beg where I can command."

"You are in my power, and you would injure me if you could, and I never forgive an injury; now hear me! unless you consent willingly to become my wife, and I will go far away from here with you and do all I can to make you happy—"

"Happy with you, a murderer, a fugitive from justice, a low thief, and a highwayman," sneered the maiden; but, unheeding her remark, he went on, while his face became almost fiendish:

"Unless you willingly marry me, I will kill your father, and then force you to do as I command, and once my wife, you shall also die, and then your inheritance, your father's wealth, for I will then hold the notes given the Jew, and the Valley Mine, will all fall to me; now do you see the devil you have raised in me?"

She did see and she shrank from him in horror, for she knew how thoroughly in his power she was.

A moment he gazed at her, and then turned away, saying rudely:

"I will give you until to-morrow to decide, and here you shall remain; but I warn you, that an attempt to escape will be useless, as one of my men shall guard this door."

Just then there came to his ears the rapid rattle of firearms, and calling to one of the card-players near the other cabins to act as guard over the maiden, Royal Keene bounded away, and poor Louise was left alone with her own sad thoughts; alone, with a terrible fate threatening her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TO THE RESCUE.

As Wild Nell, in advance of the stage-coach, rode along rapidly toward the Valley Mine, she suddenly drew rein, for before her she discovered a party of horsemen.

But her keen eyes soon told her that they were not foes, and urging her pony forward she drew rein in a few moments by the side of Buffalo Bill.

At the side of the Scout rode Lord Varian, and both of them had thrown off all disguises and appeared in *propria persona*, only the Englishman having shaved, and had his hair cut, did not look natural.

Behind these two came Jack Nelson and Beaver Ben, and the whole party were thoroughly mounted and armed.

"Wild Nell, you seem troubled," said the Scout, inquiringly, as the woman dashed up.

"I am, Bill, for there has been trouble."

"I feared it, and that is why we rode on to meet the stage: tell me all."

"Yonder comes the stage, and you see Mr. Melville by the side of Rocky Tom?"

"And his daughter?" asked Buffalo Bill, with anxiety he could not conceal.

"She is a prisoner, Bill."

"A prisoner? Great heavens! and to whom?" and the Scout's voice was husky as he asked the question.

"I will tell you all; I met Star Eye, and we followed the stage, overtaking it and finding the Red Masks around it."

"The Red Masks are nothing more than the Nighthawks, Wild Nell; but go on."

"Well, they had halted the stage, after firing upon it and killing that city swell, Marmaduke, and they were evidently robbing the others as we came up; but the leader seized Miss Melville

in his arms, bounded into the thicket, mounted his horse and rode away with her, though Red Heart and his warriors pressed the Nighthawks hard and killed two of their number."

"And Miss Melville is in their hands now?" asked Buffalo Bill, his voice hoarse with passion.

"Yes, but Red Heart and his braves continued on their trail, while I went back to console Mr. Melville, and tell him you awaited him at the mine."

The stage now dashed up and Rocky Tom drawing rein, a consultation was held, and Buffalo Bill urged that they should at once continue on in pursuit of the Nighthawks.

"Jack, you can ride, anyway, so let Mr. Melville have your horse, and you take one of Tom's leaders."

"I'm more than willing, Bill," said Jack Nelson.

"And I'm goin' ter this funeral, too, you kin bet, pard," cried Rocky Tom, springing to the ground.

A short delay to prepare the leaders, and hitch the wheel-horses securely, and the party mounted and rode away, leaving the coach and its ghastly load standing by the roadside.

"How many braves has Red Heart with him, Nell?" asked Buffalo Bill, as they struck the trails of pursuers and pursued, and rode rapidly along.

"Twenty, just."

"And himself and Star Eye, for she is as good as any warrior, make twenty-two, while we have eight here, for I count you, Wild Nell, as a man."

"Enough ter wipe out ther Nighthawks, I'm sartin," said Beaver Ben, and the others concurred in his opinion.

A ride of several miles and they came upon Red Heart and his warriors, posted around the mouth of the cañon.

In a few words the old chief told the Scout that he had sent half a dozen braves to reconnoiter, and encircle the cañon, and a council of war was at once held.

"Let several of your braves take positions on the hills and fire down upon the Nighthawks in the ravine, chief, and then we will all charge together and carry the entrance by storm," said the Scout, and preparations to carry out this plan were at once entered into.

In half an hour the Indians opened fire from the hills, and with yells the charging party moved forward to the attack.

This it was that had startled Royal Keene, and caused him to hastily leave poor Louise in the cabin.

Having to scatter from the fire of the Indians on the hills, the Nighthawks were not able to seek cover before the enemy was upon them, for they were taken wholly by surprise, not fearing an attack from the red-skins, and unaware of their having white allies.

But they fought as they ran, and the whole party reached the entrance to the cavern to gether.

There the ringing voice of Royal Keene, who had again resumed his red mask, cheered his men on, and reinforced by those who had come from the cabins, the fight became one of fierce desperation.

But the attacking party slightly outnumbered the Nighthawks, and having determined to conquer them, they pressed them hotly into the cavern, and then out into the bowl-like space beyond.

There the outlaws rallied for a desperate stand; but Buffalo Bill, followed by Lord Varian and Wild Nell, drove spurs into their horses and bounded into their very midst, and the line was broken.

With triumphant yells, Red Heart and his warriors now pressed them hard, and Jack Nelson, Beaver Ben and Star Eye having taken them in the flank, the outlaws cried for mercy.

"Hold! do not kill those men who beg for their lives!" shouted Buffalo Bill.

"I do not beg for my life."

It was Royal Keene who spoke, and he stood at bay, his back against a cabin, and his knife in hand, for he had fired his last shot.

"And yet you fear to show your face," said the Scout, confronting him.

Instantly the red mask was torn away.

"Great God! it is my wicked nephew," cried Mr. Melville, in a tone of horror and sorrow commingled.

"Royal Keene, I command you to surrender," and Buffalo Bill advanced toward him.

"Never!"

"I can shoot you as you stand, if I so desire."

"True, but I know you too well for that, Buffalo Bill; you are no murderer, I'll say that, much as I hate you."

"I hain't governed by no sich high-toned feelin', pard, and I will therefore call yer fer yer chips."

It was Beaver Ben who spoke, and he was raising his rifle while speaking.

"No, Ben; I'll attend to this matter," and then turning to Royal Keene he continued:

"You are at bay, Royal Keene, and a desperate man, so I am unwilling to shoot you, and offer you terms."

"Name them!"

"First, you have Miss Melville a prisoner over here?"

"She is my prisoner," was the haughty response.

"Pardon me, I am no longer in your power."

It was Louise Melville's voice, and she came around the corner of the next cabin, accompanied by Star Eye, who had released her from her bondage.

"It is well I did not reach you, fair cousin, or my last act would have been to drive my knife to your heart," recklessly said Royal Keene, while Louise was drawn to her father's arms.

"I don't doubt you would commit any crime, Royal Keene, but now I wish to ask you a few questions."

"Buffalo Bill, I shall answer no questions, except you grant me one favor."

"And that is?"

"That you meet me knife to knife in deadly combat; if I kill you, I am to have permission to leave here free; if you kill me, then you have accomplished your aim."

"I accept your terms, sir, and Jack Nelson will see that you go unmolested from here if I fall by your hands."

Even the stolid Indians looked up in surprise, when Buffalo Bill, who held Royal Keene wholly in his power, was going to risk his life in personal combat with him; a man of desperate courage and wondrous skill with the knife.

But Buffalo Bill had given his word and Royal Keene smiled grimly in anticipation of his deadly revenge over the man he so hated.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

KNIFE TO KNIFE.

"Oh, Bill! brave and powerful as you are, do not face that man, for I know his marvelous strength and skill."

It was Wild Nell who spoke, and she confronted the Scout, her face pale, her look most anxious.

"Nell, I have tracked that man for one purpose: to kill him, or be killed in the attempt," was the decided response.

"Let me entreat you not to risk your life, sir; take him to the town and let him there suffer for his crimes," plead Louise Melville.

"No, no, my sweet cousin, I am not to be taken to the town for trial, for I will cut down any man who advances upon me, and force them to shoot me here," recklessly put in Royal Keene, and he brandished his knife threateningly.

"You need no fear, sir; I have given you my word, and I will meet you; now tell me who killed Lord Walter Elphistone, the brother of this gentleman?"

"I did!"

The Englishman started and made a step toward the man who so boldly confessed the crime; but Buffalo Bill held him back and continued:

"What had you against Lord Elphistone?"

"I needed money, and he had plenty; I hunted with him, and hired two cutthroats to shoot him, I leading him into ambush for them to do so; but after they had done the job they wanted more money, so I shot them down, and had all for myself."

Without a sign of shame the man made his confession, while tearing the diamond locket from her bosom, Wild Nell cried:

"And this that you gave me, with your likeness in it, did you take from your victim?"

"Yes, Nell."

Instantly the woman hurled the costly locket upon the ground, and at the feet of Lord Varian, crying, passionately:

"Take it, sir; I had hoped that he was not so vile as that; to let me wear his likeness over my heart, encircled by a blood-stained frame."

Wild Nell, overcome by her emotion, turned away, as if abhorring the sight of the man before her.

"The rest of your booty you sold and squandered, Royal Keene?" continued the Scout.

"Yes, I turned the jewels into gold and gambled it away."

"Lord Varian, you need feel no doubt now but that your unfortunate brother fell by this man's hand; here, this is yours," and Buffalo Bill took up the locket, dug the likeness of Royal Keene out with the point of his knife, and handed it to Lord Varian.

"Now, another question, sir; did not that Jew and judge come West to aid you in a plot to defraud your uncle here of his mine and other wealth?"

"They did; their villainy is a match for mine, only they lacked the courage," was the reckless reply.

"That is one virtue you possess, bad as you are; but now tell me if you are not Roy Kenyon?"

In spite of his wonderful nerve the man started; but he answered in the same reckless tone:

"It would be useless to deny my name, as there stand my uncle and cousin who can tell you the truth: *yes, I am Roy Kenyon.*"

"And you once knew a girl whose name was Nellie Merton?"

"Ha! ha! what a good detective you are; there stands sweet Nellie Merton now, but on this border she goes as Wild Nell."

With flashing face Wild Nell turned upon the speaker, and with blazing eyes she cried:

"How dare you, Roy Kenyon, breathe that name here—a name you have dishonored?"

"Nellie, I know all," and Buffalo Bill spoke in the kindest tones; "I know that you once had a happy home, and that, believing Roy Kenyon an honorable man, he won your love; and I know that he led you to secretly marry him, as you believed, and you found too late that it was but a mock marriage."

"Loving him, in spite of the wrong he had done you, you followed him here, and thus it was you became the wild, reckless woman that you are, yet through all have clung to him, forgetting that there was one whom you left to mourn you in the desolate home you fled from."

"My mother! my poor, poor, broken-hearted mother!" cried Wild Nell, in an agony of grief, and stepping to her side Louise Melville drew her toward her, with true womanly sympathy.

"Nellie, shall I tell you how I found that mother, found her through the act of that false man, who killed an old miner, Alf Buckner by name, because he would not allow him to defraud Mr. Melville out of this mine?"

"But ere Alf Buckner died, he told me of his life, and gave me a locket to carry to the only woman he had ever loved."

"That woman was your mother, Nellie, and I carried to her the locket, and I found her upon her death-bed, dying of a broken heart."

"Then it was that she told me of you, and of that man, and I swore to her that I would yet track Roy Kenyon to his death, and she bade me find you, and give to you this likeness of herself, so long worn by the old miner: see, it is shattered here, and the gold is bent, yet the face is perfect; but it saved my life, Nellie, when an intended assassin fired at me a few nights ago, upon my leaving the hotel, after that trouble in the saloon; here is the bullet caught in the gold."

He held forth the locket given him by the dying miner in the Valley Mine, and with trembling hand Wild Nell seized it, crying in hoarse tones:

"And my mother?"

"Is dead, Nellie."

The head drooped again upon the shoulder of Louise Melville, with a low cry, but the precious locket went up to the lips of the stricken girl, and Lord Varian, Mr. Melville, and the others seemed deeply moved by what they had heard from the lips of the Scout.

But Roy Kenyon, as he is now known to the reader, held his head up, his face bitter and reckless, and his knife still in hand.

"Now, Roy Kenyon, prepare to meet me, and either you or I must soon die," and Buffalo Bill threw aside his buckskin coat, and motioned to Mr. Melville to lead Louise and Wild Nell away.

But in a kind of fascination they stood, unable to move, their eyes now turned upon the two men preparing to meet in a death struggle, and all crowded nearer, for they knew that it was to be a battle of giants.

Rolling his sleeve up and grasping his knife well in hand, Roy Kenyon, with his evil, yet strangely handsome and fascinating face, wearing an expression of utter recklessness, awaited the moment to begin the struggle, his eyes narrowly watching every movement of his foe.

Having made his preparations with the utmost coolness, Buffalo Bill turned to Jack Nelson, and said, quietly:

"Jack, old fellow, if harm befall me, I wish you, as soon as you make a grave for poor Rocky Tom, who fell at the cavern entrance, and aid Red Heart to bury his three dead braves, to guide Mr. Melville on to the Valley Mine, that he may get an idea of its worth."

"Then take the party back to Denver, and see them safely started on their way back home."

A few more instructions were given in a low tone, and then, in dead silence, Buffalo Bill advanced to the combat.

With a bound Roy Kenyon sprung to meet him, and commenced the fight with a desperate lunge, which caused the heart of every one who saw it to cease beating for the instant; but the Scout skillfully parried the thrust, and Roy Kenyon felt that he had at last met his equal with the knife.

Again the two men came together, and this time they clutched in terrible embrace, their knives held together with giant force, and each glaring into the other's eyes.

Then Roy Kenyon nimbly sprung backward, and it was evident that he now knew that the Scout was his equal in strength and activity.

A moment's rest and again Roy Kenyon rushed forward; the knives clashed fiercely together for a few parries, and then Buffalo Bill caught the blade of his adversary directly in his arm, the steel piercing through, while he drove his own weapon into the heart of the Night-hawk chief.

"Curse you! oh, curse you!" broke from the

lips of Roy Kenyon, as he sunk upon the ground, and a wild yell went up from the throats of the Indians, a yell in which Jack Nelson and Beaver Ben joined, while Lord Varian bounded forward and grasped the hand of Buffalo Bill.

But above the triumphant cries arose one long wail of woe, as Wild Nell staggered forward and threw herself upon the dying form of the man who had so wronged her.

"Oh, Roy, Roy! speak to me, speak! even now I love you!"

Her tone was piteous, and she bent over the dying man with moans that would touch the hardest heart, as she wailed forth:

"Roy, only once, look in my eyes, only once before you die."

The dark eyes opened, and the fire of his impetuous spirit yet burned within them as he turned upon the woman; then the expression changed to sadness, as he murmured:

"I wronged you, Nellie, and you do not hate me."

Again his eyes closed, but all heard the word that trembled on his lips; it was simply:

"Farewell!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONCLUSION.

KIND reader, a few more words, a picture or two of home life, within the pale of civilization and without, and I have finished my "owr true tale" o' romance upon our Western border, half a score or more years ago.

Within that lordly home in old England, where dwelt Lady Geraldine Clyde, now live Lord Varian Elphistone and his beautiful wife, for, having kept his pledge to the woman who had so dearly loved his noble brother, she had kept her word also and become Lady Elphistone, a few months after her devoted lover had returned from the thrilling adventures he had met with in America, and laid the ashes of Lord Walter to rest in the tomb of his ancestors.

Growing up around the hearthstone of that noble home are two children, one of whom is known as Sir William Cody Elphistone, named after Buffalo Bill, and the other a miniature likeness of her beautiful mother, whose life is so happy, that she remembers her early love for Lord Walter as only a sorrow-tinged dream.

A year after the terrible duel in that wild Colorado cañon, Buffalo Bill took a second trip to St. Louis, and most warmly was he welcomed by Mr. Melville and the lovely Louise.

But Mr. Melville was not the *millionaire* of the olden time, for, with the high sense of honor that guided him, he had returned his notes to Moses Moloch, and, as is often the case in life, that wicked individual had prospered, and he had become a dweller in the elegant home of the man he had ruined, as the Valley Mine had again become worthless, the lead that the old miner, Alf Buckner, had struck, panning out just enough to pay back the money invested in it.

But Louise had promptly paid her father's debts out of her inheritance, and the balance was sufficient to support the father and daughter most comfortably.

One day, while on his visit to St. Louis, Buffalo Bill, while walking along the street, saw two persons coming toward him, whom he readily recognized.

Those two were Moses Moloch and Judge Shyster, still partners in evil-doing; but they also recognized the famous Scout, and turning promptly to the rightabout they started up the street at a pace only a trifle slower than that which had carried them over the hill when Wild Bill had started them upon the back trail for Denver.

As the hero of this romance of mine still lives, kind reader, at his home on the Western border, surrounded by a loving wife and children, dare I say more of how he won the heart of the lovely Louise, as she had his?

I think not, so will only add for them the hope that they may live long and prosper in all their ways.

And Star Eye, who so fondly loved the hand-some King of Buckskins?

She drooped sadly when her pale-face beau ideal whispered not his love to her; but she rallied under the friendly regard of Jack Nelson, and is now the squaw-wife of that famous hunter, who has a ranch upon the Medicine river, where he passes his days in hunting, in company with Beaver Ben and several other congenial souls.

One more picture and my story ends; but it is a sad picture to dwell upon, to behold, for it looks upon a woman living the life of a hermit, and guarding in the lonely mountains the grave of the man she so dearly loved, and who had so cruelly wronged her in life.

That woman is Wild Nell, once Nellie Merton, the belle of a South-western village; now a mere wreck of womanhood, dwelling apart from the world in an humble cabin, where none dare intrude upon her grief-stricken life.

THE END.

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